

San Pedro Creek Culture Park

INTERPRETIVE PLAN



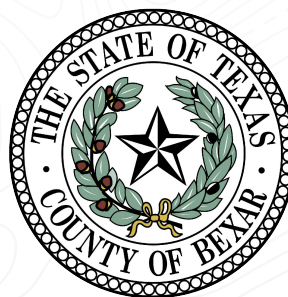
Completed (Phase 1.1)



In design (Phase 1.3)



In construction (Phase 1.2)





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**“AS THE PLACE WHERE SAN ANTONIO WAS BORN, THE
STORY OF THE CREEK AND THE CITY ARE FOREVER
INTERTWINED.”**

—John Philip Santos

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Snowy Egret attracted to Phase 1.1 amenities of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park
(by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

San Pedro Creek issues from the Edwards Aquifer at San Pedro Springs. This waterway travels south approximately five-miles to join the San Antonio River. Draining over 45 fertile acres, the tributary supports a diverse ecosystem, including over 12,000 years of human settlement. The richness of the soil results in part from the natural cycle of floods during the region's wet seasons. Before the introduction of flood-control interventions, the flooding creek caused loss of life and considerable property damage. Multiple phases of creek channelization eventually turned the the formerly tree-lined natural banks and pastoral stream into a concrete-lined (and even culverted) storm drain. Although Bexar County and the City of San Antonio were established along the creek, by the middle of the 20th century, both entities had turned their backs to this watery birthplace, reduced to a drain.



Footprint of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park and surrounding areas benefiting from its flood control improvements (by San Antonio River Authority)

Contemporaneous with the West Side Creek Project study, which included San Pedro Creek, in 2012–2013 Bexar County funded a \$700,000 Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) to analyze San Pedro Creek’s ability to withstand 100-year flood conditions. The plan also included a design solution for the creek’s inadequacy to hold 100-year floodwaters within its banks and a concept for reconnecting the creek to the surrounding urban context and for reestablishing its natural environment. This was done by reimagining the storm drain as a linear urban park with natural habitats for native flora and fauna, play spaces for people living here and visiting, and economic revitalization opportunities.



Phase 1.1 of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park under construction (by San Antonio River Authority)

The San Pedro Creek Culture Park is the realization of this initial study. The project results from a unique collaboration of three public partners—Bexar County (as funder and project initiator), the San Antonio River Authority, and the City of San Antonio—with input from the San Pedro Creek Citizen Advisory Committee representing more than a dozen local community entities. Together, they fine-tuned visionary goals and overcame obstacles. While the main purpose of the project is to provide the next and much-improved generation of flood control, the park project simultaneously serves as a public and natural amenity. Encompassing over two miles of the creek’s nearly 4-mile above-ground length, it transforms the 20th-century concrete-lined drain into a beautiful park through feats of engineering, lush landscaping with native plants, wildlife

habitat development, copious public art, rich historical resources, and recreational opportunities. In addition to protecting the safety and integrity of the community and showcasing natural, historical, and cultural assets, the economic revitalization that it is sparking has wide-ranging benefits for San Antonio and Bexar County.



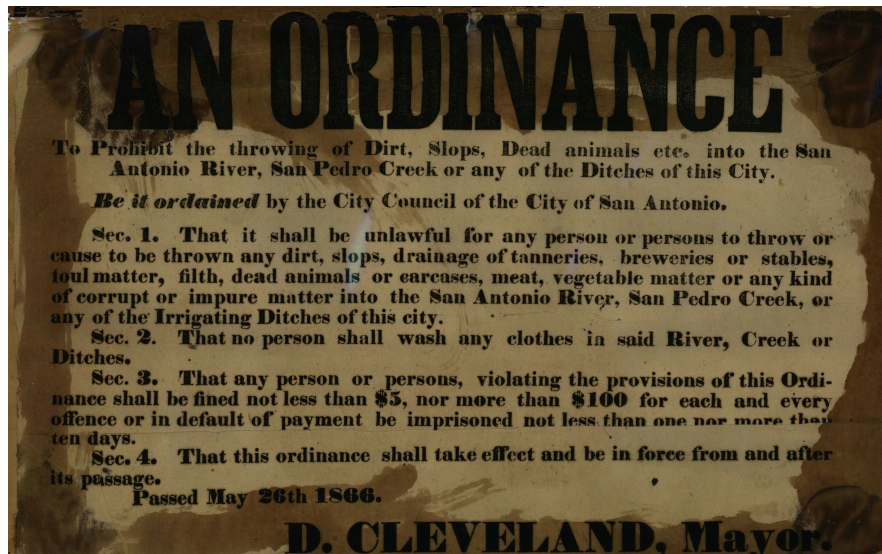
Phase 1.1 of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park under construction (by San Antonio River Authority)

INTERPRETIVE SIGNIFICANCE

As the birthplace of San Antonio de Béxar in 1718, San Pedro Creek courses through the veins of Bexar County and the city of San Antonio, though its story goes back much farther than the Spanish colonization of Texas. It has supported human life in this region for at least 12,000 years and has supported floral and faunal life for much longer.

San Pedro Creek runs parallel to the San Antonio River for five miles before the two join forces. This double asset was exploited by the Spanish-led effort to colonize the region through the introduction of agriculture and settled communities. During this period of time (early 18th through early 19th centuries) and extending into the early 20th century, the two watercourses were connected and extended through a sophisticated system of hand-dug channels, called *acequias*, which allowed for irrigation of large areas of land, resulting in urban growth. This growth was concentrated between the two waterways and along their banks. With water being crucial to life, San Pedro Creek has touched or been touched by most aspects of the area's history.

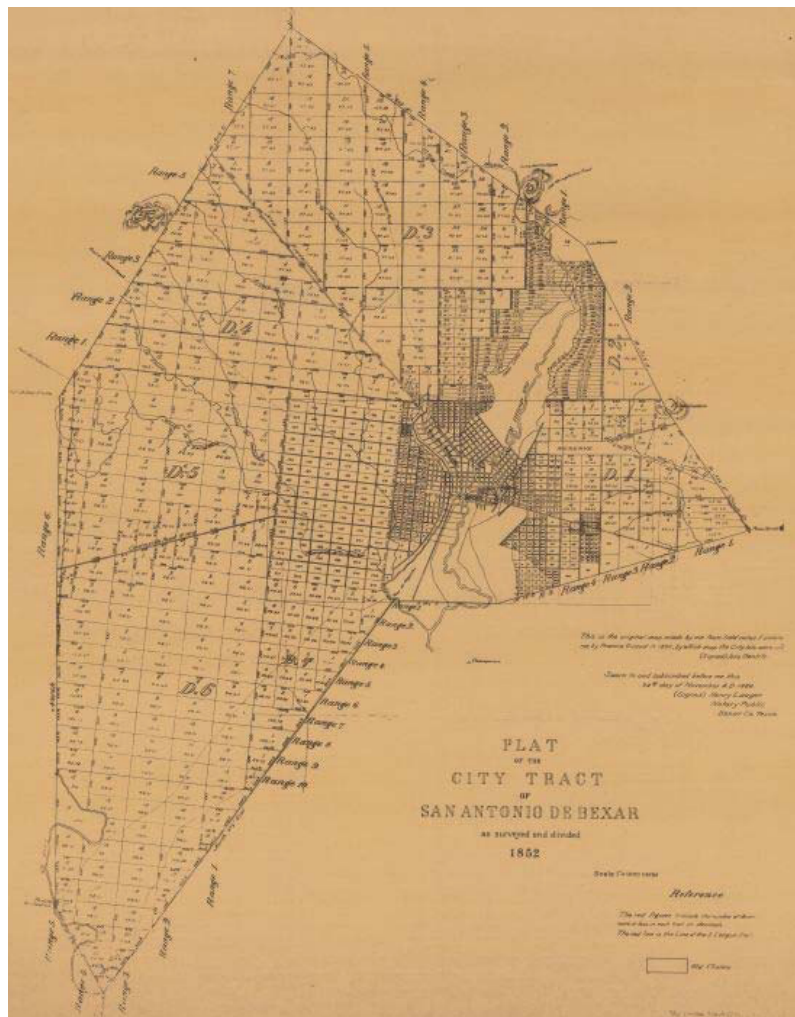
San Pedro Creek's story, which begins thousands of years ago and includes the seminal founding of San Antonio de Béxar, is critical to the overall history of San Antonio and Bexar County. Located on the west side of town, the creek has historical associations with Apache raids, refugee resettlement, poverty, the city-sanctioned red-light district, slaughter houses, and industrial production. As a result, this story has been ignored, just as the creek itself has been marginalized and forgotten.



1866 City Ordinance regarding befouling San Pedro Creek (by City of San Antonio Municipal Archives)

Significant as San Pedro Creek has been to the region's history and urbanization through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was channelized, culverted, and ignored over the course of the 20th century by the surrounding urban context. This ignominy and effacement, too, are part of the creek's history—as is its rebirth with the San Pedro Creek Culture Park.

With advice from the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee, the authors of this plan have focussed the interpretation for Phase 1.2 through Phase 4 of the park's development on the story of the creek as it relates to the urban and cultural history of the region. The interpretation also includes the story of the Culture Park's development through innovative engineering and landscaping solutions, and it includes content on the flora and fauna returning to the creek, thanks to improvements in water quality and habitat development.



City Tract of San Antonio de Béxar, 1852 (by City of San Antonio Municipal Archives)

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park are:

- Improved flood control to meet 100-year flood conditions
- Reestablishment of cultural connections
- Improved water quality
- Provision of public art
- Enhancement of natural features and provision of landscaping
- Creation of opportunities for economic revitalization and development



Celebrating the completion of San Pedro Creek Culture Park Phase 1.1 (by San Antonio River Authority)

INTENT OF THE INTERPRETIVE PLAN

The main goal of an Interpretive Plan is to define an interpretive vision for a project. This is essential in providing a satisfying visitor experience. Building upon the interpretive resources developed in Phase 1.1 of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park, this Interpretive Plan intends to: (1) establish an overall, cohesive vision for this multi-pronged project, and (2) guide the development of the park's interpretive features from Phase 1.2 through Phase 4. These features include the San Pedro Creek Public Art program, interpretive panels along the park *paseos* and on the bridges, the San Pedro Creek Culture Park mobile app, the park's website, and potentially other media.

To accomplish this, the plan:

- Defines visitor needs
- Establishes an interpretive theme for the project, based on public input through the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee
- Identifies relevant stories, based upon the precedent established in Phase 1.1, public input through the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee, and additional research
- Defines topics for 56 interpretive panels to be developed in phases 1.2 through 4.0 of the project
- Maps approximate locations for these 56 interpretive panels situated between the Houston Street bridge and the Interstate 35 overpass (at the southern end of the park)
- Develops storylines for each of the 56 interpretive panels, providing content for the panels, mobile app, and website.

Please note: Since the Storyline Development is meant to provide content for the interpretive panels and other interpretive features, its discussions of the park's design, construction, and impacts on wildlife and the local economy, for examples, are written in the past tense.

Further note: During the course of this interpretive plan's development, new archaeological findings were made, and more will be made after the plan is completed. The intent of this plan is to provide a *foundational structure and strategy for interpretation* throughout the park, whose realization will take place over a number of years. The content and placement of panels may change with new discoveries, such as these. The plan has built-in flexibility to accommodate such changes. As stated elsewhere, the content and placement of panels outlined in this plan are recommendations only and are based on current knowledge.

METHODOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

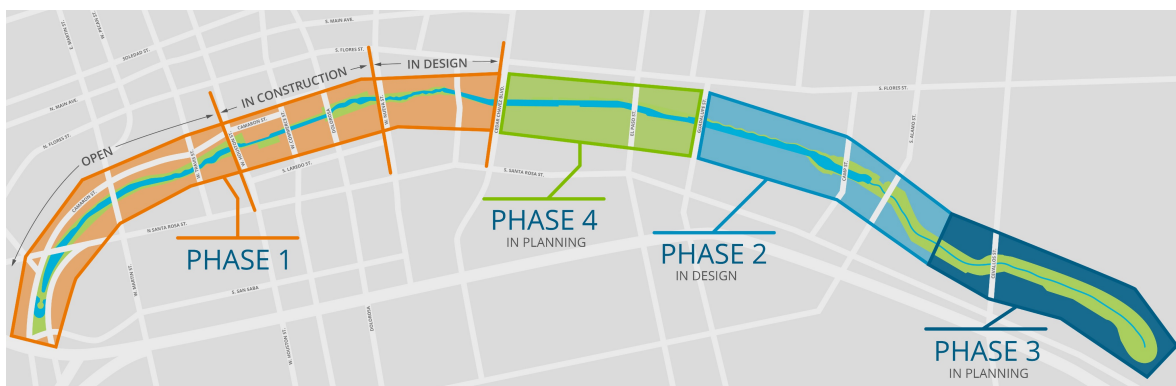
The content of this Interpretive Plan was derived through field research and walking tours of the project, bibliographic research, archival research, meetings with the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee (a group of informed citizens who represent numerous local cultural organizations), and many interviews of experts in the various fields of study involved.

Meetings with the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee, facilitated by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates and project leaders at the San Antonio River Authority, were held on the following dates: October 26, 2018, February 27, 2019, April 15, 2019, and February 20, 2020.

In addition, Interpretive Plan meetings were held with representatives of Bexar County and SARA project leaders on April 8, 2019, and with the project's design team on April 23, 2019.

The preliminary list of interpretive topics and locations for interpretive panels was presented to project leaders at SARA, representatives of Bexar County, the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee, and the project's design team at a series of meetings in April, 2019, for approval, which was granted.

A list of bibliographic sources and interviewees consulted can be found at the end of this document.



Phase map of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park (by San Antonio River Authority)

VISITOR NEEDS

To address a variety of learning types, the proposed interpretation and associated public art installations include graphic, textual, audible, and tactile components.

Since a significant percentage of local residents and tourists (and therefore potential park visitors) are Spanish-speaking only, the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee recommended that all interpretation for the park, including printed interpretive panels, be developed in Spanish as well as English.

An audience profile was not conducted as part of the Interpretive Plan; however, the project leaders defined the anticipated audience for this public park as being local residents and tourists (including visiting friends and family of local residents) of all ages, nationalities, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and levels of education.



Visitors to San Pedro Creek Culture Park Phase 1.1
(by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates; photographed with permission)

UNDERLYING THEME

An interpretive project has a central theme, which ties together the information presented. It defines what the content covers and does not cover. It establishes the main idea of the project. This is the take-home message, like the moral of a story.

SAN PEDRO CREEK CULTURE PARK THEME

Crafted with input from the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee, the theme established for this project is:

The San Pedro Creek Culture Park (SPCCP) tells the story of San Pedro Creek: its indigenous, ecological, social, cultural, economic, and landscape histories, which are densely embedded in the creek and are significant to the interweaving of cultures that continues to define Bexar County.



Wildlife attracted to Phase 1.1 amenities of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park
(by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Following the intent defined by the project theme, the interpretive approach selected was to braid together three strands of storylines over the length of the park: (1) culture, (2) ecology, and (3) engineering (both contemporary and historical). This has been accomplished by alternating interpretive content along the creek among these three strands. In this way, natural subject matter, cultural subject matter, and engineering subject matter is addressed throughout the park, as it pertains to specific locations.

This approach is consistent with the three topic-focussed walking tours that were already established in Phase 1.1, which encourage visitors to experience the park with three different lenses: art, culture, and nature. Likewise, these topic-focussed walking tours can be extended through the length of the continuing park, with the addition of an engineering-focussed tour.

Per the San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee's commitment to telling "the story of San Pedro Creek," as established with the project theme, the decision was made to tell only stories tangent to the creek, rather than general stories related to Bexar and San Antonio history in general.

The project's interpretation was further defined to follow a Cultural Landscape Studies approach. This collective, *longue-durée* strategy understands individual monuments and events within the larger context of gradually developing social processes and evolving social structures.

COMMITTEE WORK TO DEFINE THEME AND STORYLINES

During the San Pedro Creek Interpretive Plan Committee Meeting on October 26, 2018, two brainstorming sessions were held. The first was to identify messages that committee members thought the project should impart to visitors. The second was to identify stories that committee members thought the park's interpretation should address.

QUESTION 1

What is the MESSAGE that you want visitors to take home from the San Pedro Creek Culture Park (SPCCP)? What do you want visitors to grasp?

- That San Pedro Creek is historically significant
- That water is the basis for everything, including the city itself
- That San Pedro Creek represents the confluence of people from indigenous to recent arrivals and the histories they bring
- That San Pedro Creek is an American story
- That the creek has been used for economic production
- That the creek and the river are deceptive (scale-wise): they are impressive in impact, though diminutive in scale; likewise, San Antonio was small but hugely important
- That the SPCCP should be a friendly place, a place for families; it should provide a format for creating memories
- That the SPCCP (and the creek itself) should be an educational place
- That the Creek = Life
- That the creek is unique in being both south and west
- That the creek is situated at a Crossroads:
 - Camino Real
 - Cattle Drives
 - Santa Anna
- That the SPCCP is embedded in different ecologies:
 - The natural
 - The cultural
 - The art
- That San Pedro Creek was sacred to indigenous populations and is the bedrock of cultures that followed
- That the creek has been critical to the local economy
- Education (water biology classes)
- That Phase 1.2 is a dense place of historical and cultural influence

- That this is a place of Timelessness and Continuity: It's not just about the past but open to the present. It's a Living Thing.
- That the meaning of this place is tied to Migrations: everything is moving: the water moves, people move
- That this place is about Contemplation
 - Contemplative state of mind to be able to be receptive to absorb all the layers of history, culture, nature, life, and memory
 - Similar to Art, it evokes a sense of meaning that can be put into words
 - The creek is a continuum of so many things
- Concern for short attention spans and needs of the next generations

QUESTION 2

What important STORIES should the San Pedro Creek Culture Park address (from Phase 1.2 through Phase 4)?

- The idea that this place is pre-historic and the dinosaurs where once there. Put big footprint of dinosaurs – or the fauna leaves
- Or a mastodon
- We have some of the story in the first part of the creek, continue in the same vein
- Battles – certain arrival of groups, economic production
- Fish in the creek – and also mussels and *camaron* (shrimp) and crawfish
- People were living on that creek (washing clothes, fishing), people owned property (like *Casa Navarro*) – that's what it was
- Keep it very interactive to keep it belonging to the people
- Black communities that live around church – this can be traced through deed records
- The thread that runs everything together is the springs – list of various peoples, the Presidio families, the Canary Island settlers, and the acequias that the Spanish built
- Natural resources before humans occupied the area – then establish that other groups arrived – and then go down the creek and talk about how others arrived
- At one point the Spanish-speaking theater district, for the Mexican-American community, was significant
- Six or so early Spanish/Hispanic founding groups
- African-American community
- Italian community
- Lebanese community
- Laredito
- The creek formed the west edge of village and provided protection
 - (cemetery other side)
 - An entry point for new groups

- The creek, there's two sides, west of the creek was a Mexican town – there are both sides of the creek
- 2 Sides of creek developed differently
 - West = Mexican and Chinese school
 - East = Belgians (market)
- Contemplation – definition, looking at something for a long time – talks of the presence of mind, contemplative state of mind that it allows the depth and focus to understand everything. That will help to establish a voice, or narrative.
- Talk about people in their proper presence, what kid wouldn't like to be represented in some way – to make it inclusive, nod to groups that have had an impact
- All groups coming together for commerce, Where everyone is congregating
 - Can use commerce to discuss ethnic diversity
- Transient groups - gypsy caravans
- People look no more than 3 minutes than anything, how to make an impactful statement
- In order to grab attention, it has to be remarkable and unlike someplace else – if you see works of art
- Transformation – illustrated by a lot of things:
 - Railroad arrival
 - Creek became unhealthy
- Natural history stories



Ducks enjoying the San Pedro Creek Culture Park
(by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

INTERPRETATION TOPICS BY LOCATION

I. HOUSTON ST. TO COMMERCE ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 1.BR: HISTORY OF HOUSTON STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 1.1: EARLY OCCUPATION/SETTLEMENT ALONG AND WEST OF
SAN PEDRO CREEK

PANEL 1.2: AFRICAN-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT AND WORSHIP NEAR
SAN PEDRO CREEK

PANEL 1.3: WESTSIDE THEATERS

PANEL 1.4: SPCCP ECOLOGY: AQUATIC PLANTS AND PLANTINGS

PANEL 1.5: ENGINEERING FEATS OF THE SPCCP

II. COMMERCE ST. TO DOLOROSA ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 2.BR: HISTORY OF COMMERCE STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 2.1: IMPACT OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION ON THE WEST SIDE
OF SAN PEDRO CREEK (INCLUDING CONTINENTAL HOTEL)

PANEL 2.2: PRESIDIO SAN ANTONIO DE BÉXAR AND MILITARY PLAZA

PANEL 2.3: SPCCP ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

PANEL 2.4: SPCCP ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM + NATIVE
BIRDS

PANEL 2.5: LAREDO STREET AND LAREITO

III. DOLOROSA ST. TO NUEVA ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 3.BR: HISTORY OF DOLOROSA STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 3.1: SPCCP ECOLOGY ZONE 1: TOLERANT FISH

PANEL 3.2: SPCCP ENGINEERING DESIGN: LOW IMPACT
DEVELOPMENT (LID) FEATURES

PANEL 3.3–3.4: SPCCP MAP–TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTING NAVARRO, DE
LA GARZA, AND RUIZ HOUSES AND SITUATING
SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL BEXAR EVENTS (INCLUDING
REVOLUTIONARY BATTLES)

PANEL 3.5: SPCCP ENGINEERING DESIGN: GATE AT NUEVA STREET
[to be developed as part of Phase 1.3]
ADDITIONAL MOBILE APP/WEBSITE TOPIC: HISTORIC KITCHEN
GARDENS ALONG SAN PEDRO CREEK

IV. NUEVA ST. TO CHAVEZ ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 4.BR: HISTORY OF NUEVA STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 4.1: PEOPLE OF SAN PEDRO CREEK
PANEL 4.2: URBAN RENEWAL AND EXPANSION OF GOVERNMENT
BUILDINGS
PANEL 4.3: CATTLE GRAZING/SLAUGHTERING/SHIPPING
PANEL 4.4: HISTORIC ENGINEERING EFFORTS ALONG SAN PEDRO
CREEK
PANEL 4.5: LATE 19TH TO EARLY 20TH-CENTURY INDUSTRY ALONG
SAN PEDRO CREEK

V. CHAVEZ ST. BRIDGE TO EL PASO ST. *[Phase 4, possibly no exposed creek]*

BRIDGE PANEL 5.BR: HISTORY OF CHAVEZ STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 5.1: MKT RAILROAD AND CULVERTING OF SAN PEDRO CREEK
PANEL 5.2: INDUSTRIALIZATION SURROUNDING MKT RAILROAD AND
SAN PEDRO CREEK
PANEL 5.3: SPCCP ECOLOGY: NATIVE SHADE TREES
PANEL 5.4: U.S. ARMY ARSENAL STORY
PANEL 5.5: SPCCP ECOLOGY: NATIVE ORNAMENTAL TREES

VI. EL PASO TO GUADALUPE STREETS *[Phase 4, possibly no exposed creek]*

BRIDGE PANEL 6.BR: HISTORY OF EL PASO/ARSENAL STREET NAME

PANEL 6.1: SAN PEDRO CREEK ECOLOGY: NATIVE REPTILES AND
AMPHIBIANS
PANEL 6.2: SAN PEDRO CREEK AND ACEQUIA SYSTEM

**PANEL 6.3: SAN PEDRO CREEK ECOLOGY: NATIVE SHRUBS, VINES,
AND GROUND COVERS**

**PANEL 6.4: HISTORY OF FLOODS AND CREEK CHANNELING + SAN
PEDRO CREEK FLOOD CONTROL TUNNEL OUTLET**

VII. GUADALUPE ST. TO CAMP ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 7.BR: HISTORY OF GUADALUPE STREET/BRIDGE NAME

**PANEL 7.1: HISTORICAL RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL
DEVELOPMENT ALONG SAN PEDRO CREEK AND FLORES
STREET**

PANEL 7.2: SPCCP ECOLOGY: ZONE 2: INTERMEDIATE FISH

PANEL 7.3: SPCCP ECOLOGY: AGAVES AND OTHER SUCCULENTS

**PANEL 7.4: SPCCP ENGINEERING: CDS® SYSTEMS FOR TRASH
REMOVAL**

**PANEL 7.5: SPCCP ECOLOGY: HISTORIC AQUATIC CREEK FAUNA AND
THE RETURN OF NATIVE SHELLFISH AND CRUSTACEANS**

VIII. CAMP ST. TO S. ALAMO ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 8.BR: HISTORY OF CAMP STREET/BRIDGE NAME

**PANEL 8.1: CANDY PRODUCTION ALONG SAN PEDRO CREEK (AND
RECENT PACE DEVELOPMENTS)**

**PANEL 8.2: SPCCP ECOLOGY: NATIVE DRAGONFLIES AND
DAMSELFLIES**

IX. SOUTH ALAMO ST. TO CEVALLOS ST. BRIDGES

**BRIDGE PANEL 9.BR: HISTORY OF SOUTH ALAMO STREET/BRIDGE
NAME**

**PANEL 9.1: SPCCP ENGINEERING: BASE STREAM FLOW AND
AUGMENTED STREAM FLOW**

**PANEL 9.2: ARRIVAL OF THE SAP RAILROAD AND TRANSFORMATIONS
TO SAN PEDRO CREEK AND FORMER LABORES**

PANEL 9.3: SPCCP ECOLOGY: NATIVE PERENNIALS AND GRASSES

**PANEL 9.4: HISTORY OF THE PECAN TREE ALONG SAN PEDRO CREEK
(FROM INDIGENOUS USES OF PECANS TO LARGE-SCALE
PECAN CULTIVATION)**

**PANEL 9.5: PECAN SHELLERS' STRIKE: A SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL
HISTORY**

X. CEVALLOS ST. BRIDGE TO I-35 OVERPASS

BRIDGE PANEL 10.BR: HISTORY OF CEVALLOS STREET/BRIDGE NAME

PANEL 10.1: SPCCP ECOLOGY: NATIVE POLLINATORS

PANEL 10.2: LABORES DE ABAJO: BREAD BASKET OF BÉXAR

PANEL 10.3: HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

PANEL 10.4: SPC ECOLOGY: ZONE 3: NATIVE (INTOLERANT) FISH

PANEL 10.5: UNION STOCKYARDS

PANEL 10.6: SPCCP PROGRAM GOALS AND OVERVIEW

SITE MAPS WITH PANEL LOCATIONS

The two attached maps (Attachment 1 and Attachment 2) identify locations for the interpretive panels, indexed above.

- The first map (Attachment 1) is a detailed design layout of Phase 1.2 with very specific locations for interpretive panels.
- The second map (Attachment 2) is a generalized phase map for the project with proposed locations for the interpretive panels. Though too small to read, please see this map reproduced on the following page for reference.

PANEL PLACEMENT PROVISIO

Many of the panels describe historic features or events and have been located in proximity to these. The exact placement, however, will need to be determined in coordination with the design of these areas. Similarly, many of the panels describe design and engineering features of the project whose exact locations have not yet been determined (for example, CDS structures, bioswales, specific flora, etc.). The locations proposed here are provisional and will need to be updated once the later project phases have been designed and the locations of these features have been determined.



Proposed locations for interpretive panels overlaid on project phase map—for general reference only. Panel numbers correspond with the topics listed on pp. 18–21.

To view a larger, legible version of this map, please see Attachment 2.

Close-ups of each topic section are included with the Storyline Development on pp. 23–131.

STORYLINE DEVELOPMENT

I. HOUSTON ST. TO COMMERCE ST. BRIDGES

BRIDGE PANEL 1.Br: HISTORY OF HOUSTON STREET/BRIDGE NAME

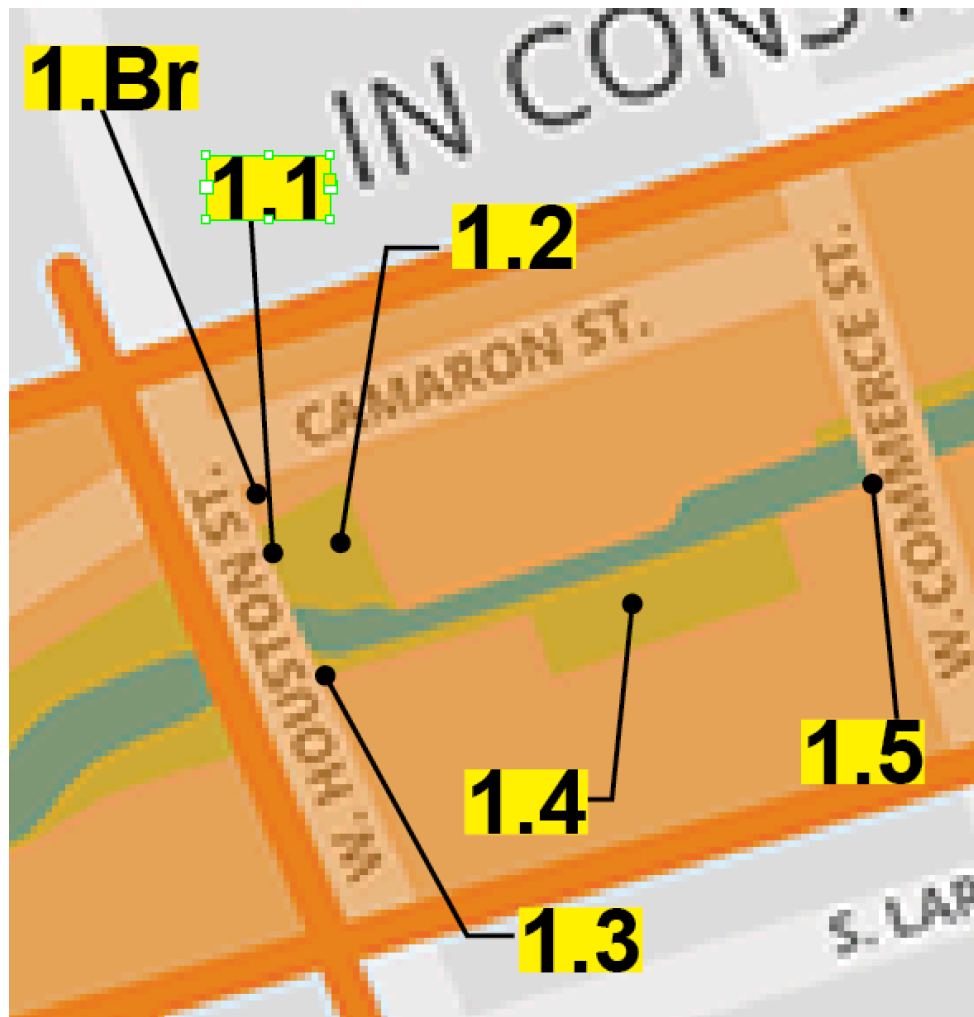
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PANEL 1.3: WESTSIDE THEATERS

PANEL 1.4: SPCCP ECOLOGY: AQUATIC PLANTS AND PLANTINGS

PANEL 1.5: ENGINEERING FEATS OF THE SPCCP



Detail of Attachment 2

BRIDGE PANEL 1.BR: HISTORY OF HOUSTON STREET/BRIDGE NAME

Originally named Rivas Street for a prominent family, the street was later renamed for Sam Houston: Texas general, president, senator, and governor.



View north of the SPCCP from the Houston Street bridge (by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

PANEL 1.1: EARLY OCCUPATION/SETTLEMENT ALONG AND WEST OF SAN PEDRO CREEK

As the Spanish slowly expanded control over the vast area that the crown claimed as New Spain, centered in Mexico City, they encountered a wide variety of indigenous people. The northeastern area of today's Mexico (the states of Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Nuevo León) and the southern coastal plain of today's Texas were home to small bands—loosely associated by language, lifestyle, and world view—that anthropologists refer to as Coahuiltecan. These groups were hunters and gathers who moved around their large territories with the seasons, harvesting game and a wide variety of edible and medicinal plants.

One of these bands, the Payaya, ranged the area generally located between the Guadalupe and Nueces rivers and from the Edwards Plateau to the Gulf of Mexico. While archeological evidence is extremely limited, it appears that the ancestors of the Payaya occupied the area around Bexar County beginning about 12,000 years ago.

The Payaya and the other Coahuiltecan bands faced a critical dilemma at the end of the 17th century. Spanish explorers and settlers were advancing on their territory from the south, and at the same time Apaches were increasingly raiding from the north. Like other bands, the Payaya decided that the Spanish would do them less harm than the Apache, so they tried to negotiate with the southern invaders in the hope of protection from the northern ones. They let it be known that Spanish missions and presidios would be tolerated, if not welcomed, in their lands.

The Spanish had already established outposts and missions among a few of the indigenous bands in today's east Texas and western Louisiana. While the Spanish encouraged their new allies to become agriculturally based, Spanish-type settlers, the major reason for these settlements, from a political perspective, was to defend the crown's claim to the area against the French, who had claimed all the lands drained by the Mississippi (including, for example, the Red River).

Around 1700 two Spanish expeditions stopped at a Payaya *ranchería* and named the river they found San Antonio de Padua (1691) and the creek San Pedro (1716). In 1718 the viceroy of New Spain, the Marqués de Valero, authorized Martín de Alarcón to establish a way station on the San Antonio River between Mission San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande and Spanish missions in east Texas. The Alarcón expedition arrived along the creek flowing from San Pedro Springs in late April and selected a site for Mission San Antonio de Valero, which was turned over to Fray Antonio Olivares, the accompanying Franciscan missionary

on May 1st. Four days later, Alarcón founded a military and civilian establishment (San Antonio de Béxar) near the springs.

The area along the creek soon proved unsatisfactory, so the religious, military, and civilian communities were moved south to land on either side of the San Antonio River. By the mid-1720s, the mission had been relocated to the east side of the river (today's Alamo Plaza), and the military and civilian settlement was positioned between the river and the creek (today's Military Plaza). A major expansion occurred in 1731 when sixteen families from the Canary Islands arrived at the presidio and were granted a town site between the presidio and the river (today's Main Plaza) and agricultural and grazing land between the river and the creek north and south of the town site. Most of the city's residential and commercial growth for the next 100 years was centered around these plazas, while the land lining San Pedro Creek and beyond was relegated to tracts for farming and grazing.



View of today's Military Plaza and renovation of City Hall (by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

PANEL 1.2: AFRICAN-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT AND WORSHIP NEAR SAN PEDRO CREEK

During the quarter century after the presidio of San Antonio de Béxar and mission of San Antonio de Valero moved from the west side of San Pedro Creek in the 1720's, the Spanish presence focused on the area between the creek and the San Antonio River. The threat of Apache raids prevented the community's use of land west of the creek. The new settlers from the Canary Islands were therefore granted land between the two streams north and south of their municipal center (Main Plaza), which was between the presidio (Military Plaza) and the river.

Once peace was reached between the Spanish and the Apache, civic leaders granted land to citizens west of the creek, but these parcels were used primarily for farming and grazing. It would be another hundred years and changes in sovereignty from Spain to Mexico to Texas to the United States before commercial activity developed along San Pedro Creek, making the creek a locus for early industrial pursuits.

In addition to the better documented ethnic groups—such as Germans and other northern Europeans—who flocked to San Antonio following Texas independence, African Americans were also prevalent among the citizenry in the 19th century (and since). Though dispersed throughout the city, the second largest concentration of African-American residences in the late 19th century was just west of San Pedro Creek, above Houston Street (see map, below).



Map of San Antonio, 1897, showing African-American residents (red dots) as reported in the City Directory
(by Clinton McKenzie, UTSA Center for Archaeological Research)

Unlike their Hispanic and European neighbors, however, who left many marks upon the landscape, the African-Americans' material record is less visible. This is why uncovering the foundations and an engraved cornerstone of an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church located along San Pedro Creek during the SPCCP channel widening was such an important find.



Engraved cornerstone of the AME church located between Cameron Street and San Pedro Creek. It served the local African-American community from ca. 1875–1877 (by San Antonio River Authority)

Sited just south of Houston Street, the church fronted onto San Pedro Street (now called Camaron Street) and backed up to San Pedro Creek. The church was situated among early industrial efforts located along San Pedro Creek, largely led by German entrepreneurs—such as Frederick Klemcke's soap and candleworks (1849), Johann Simon Nicholas Menger and Joseph Veltman's vinegar business (1850), a gas manufacturing plant (1859, later the Alameda Theater), an ice factory, and several breweries. In fact, the church, known as St. James Chapel, was located within a site that served as a soapworks for 30 years prior to being a church, and served as an ice factory and brewery for two decades afterward.

Klemcke sold his soap and candleworks business in 1851 to Simon Menger, who continued making soap there until a devastating flood in 1859. Menger then purchased an upstream site where he operated the San Antonio Soap Works until 1917.

Starting about 1870, Menger rented his San Pedro (Cameron) Street soapworks property to the African Methodist Episcopal Church to serve the neighborhood's black community as a place of worship. The congregation bought the property in 1873 and continued to occupy it until the late 1870s, building an addition 1875, whose corner stone was recovered during the SPCCP earthworks. In the 1880s, the old soap works and church were razed and became the site of the Alamo Ice and Brewing Company. That complex was purchased by Adolphus Busch in 1895 and demolished by the late 1890s.

St. James Chapel on San Pedro Creek was the second AME church in San Antonio. It was preceded by St. Mary's Chapel (also known as Green's Chapel). Control over the land and building of the first edifice resulted from a schism in the congregation, multi-year lawsuit, and construction of a second chapel.¹

According to church records, the AME Church was organized in San Antonio in the fall of 1867 under the name St. James, with an alternate Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church North congregation forming in 1868.² By the time these congregations had settled their differences in 1878, the St. James AME Church moved again to the northeast corner of Centre and North streets, selling the Cameron Street property to Edward Steves in 1880.³ At that time, the property was already in use as an ice factory.⁴ St. James AME Church moved later again, finally settling at 402 North Richter Street, where it continues to serve a broad community.

¹ "Timeline of property occupied at various times by Menger/AME Church/Alamo Ice Company/Alamo Ice and Brewing Company," by Maria Watson Pfeiffer (unpublished)

² "The Legacy of Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church of San Antonio, Texas," by the Reverend Lorenzo E. Ausbie, Pastor of St. James, 1981–1989 (unpublished)

³ Mooney & Fourmy, *Mooney and Fourmy's Directory for the City of San Antonio*, (Marshall: Jennings Bros., 1879), p. 72, in Pfeiffer (unpublished).

⁴ BCDR 12:64 (AME to Steves, December 11, 1880), in Pfeiffer (unpublished)

PANEL 1.3: WESTSIDE THEATERS

In the early 20th century, well before radio, television, and certainly the Internet, popular entertainment was provided primarily by traveling companies that presented drama, music, and comedy to an audience often in need of a little diversion from hard daily life. In 1912 the first Westside theater opened on W. Commerce Street near San Pedro Creek. Teatro Zaragoza presented entertainment by touring groups mainly from Mexico. It soon added Spanish-language films, again mostly from Mexico. Fueled by refugees from the Mexican Revolution throughout the 1910s, the audience grew substantially. Five years after the Zaragoza's debut and two doors away, the Teatro Nacional opened with a 1000-seat auditorium. These two theaters formed the nucleus of a Westside Spanish-language cultural area that included a newspaper, book stores, and restaurants. Over the years, motion pictures slowly replaced live acts as the main fare of these theaters, particularly after the introduction of talkies in the early 1930s. Unfortunately the 1930s also brought the Great Depression, which ended the early growth period of Spanish-language theaters.

After the austerity of the World War II years, the prosperity of the late 1940s allowed a resurrection of the cultural area around the old Teatro Nacional site. A block away, on Houston Street, the Alameda Theater opened in 1949. With 3,000 seats, it was the largest Spanish-language theater in the country. Like its predecessors, the Alameda hosted the most well-known and popular entertainers from Mexico as well as first-run movies from both Mexico and the U.S.

Suburban growth in the post World War II years led to general decline in downtown San Antonio. This trend, coupled with the popularity of television during the 1960s and 1970s, resulted in the Alameda's closure in the mid-1980s. Through a County/City/private partnership, the theater has a new lease on life as a small performance space supported by offices, notably the location of San Antonio's public radio station.



Alameda Theater with SPCCP construction (by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

PANEL 1.4: SPCCP ECOLOGY: AQUATIC PLANTS AND PLANTINGS

Urban waterways, such as San Pedro Creek, flow through areas covered in large part by pavement and buildings. Among the many challenges this terrain presents, the lack of absorbent surfaces—such as grasslands, wetlands, rain gardens, and permeable pavers—is perhaps the greatest factor contributing to both flooding and degraded water quality. Rain generates runoff that picks up surface dirt, oil, and trash as it heads downhill to creeks and rivers. If not partially absorbed or filtered, the runoff may quickly lead to flooded streets. Regular cycles of extended drought and severe storms produce a concentration of pollutants in stormwater, while concrete channelization (the previous condition of San Pedro Creek) prevents filtration of the water by plants that a more natural, meandering creek provides.

During the development of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park, aquatic plants were reintroduced and have succeeded in mitigating some of these polluting factors. Hardy native species of plants have been selected and grouped together in protective planting pockets. Since the prioritized goal of this downtown segment of the creek remains flood control (preventing inundation of streets and property), the durable concrete armoring remains. It defines the creek's banks and creates artificial aerating features over which the water flows, while performing the essential function of accommodating quickly fluctuating water levels with minimal erosion. In this context, the aquatic plants enhance water filtration, sequester pollutants, and provide wildlife with food and shelter. Fish, birds, turtles, frogs, snakes, insects, macroinvertebrates, and human beings all benefit.

Selected Aquatic Plants:

Horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*): This is a relic from a class of plants extending back over 100 million years to late Paleozoic forests. Like ferns, the Horsetail features a vascular system of tissues that conduct water and nutrients throughout the entire plant, and it reproduces from the dispersal of spores rather than seeds. The plant's rhizomes (underground stems that spread via lateral nodes and shoots) were utilized for basketry by indigenous peoples.

Pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*): This aquatic plant features a stalk of small purple flowers that bloom progressively upward and provide nectar to bees and butterflies. It also serves as a structural plant for dragonflies and damselflies who lay eggs on its stems near the water surface. As the name suggests, the plant's underwater thicket offers prime habitat for fish to hide. Pickerelweed excels at

bio-purification, removing excess nutrients from the water (such as nitrogen and phosphorous from fertilizer runoff) and improving water clarity. *[This species was previously pictured in the Phase 1.1 ecology panel.]*

Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*): Native Americans valued this nutritious food source for its starch-rich tubers formed on rhizomes buried in the mud. Ducks also feed on them, giving rise to the nickname “duck potatoes.” Its common name (as well as botanical genus, meaning archer) refers to its arrow-shaped leaves. Tri-petaled white flowers grow in a whorled pattern.

Water Lily (family *Nymphaeaceae*): The long stalks of water lilies are filled with tiny air pockets arising from thick horizontally spreading stems buried in mud under water. Flowers open for only certain hours during the day and attract specific pollinator cohorts. Underwater plant parts support aquatic dragonfly larvae that develop near or on the plant until they mature enough to climb out into the air.

Typical Timing of Blooms:

Morning-midday:	American white water lily
Midday:	Blue water lily
Midday-late afternoon:	Yellow water lily



Aquatic plants thriving in Phase 1.1 of the SPCCP (by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

PANEL 1.5: ENGINEERING FEATS OF THE SPCCP

Converting San Pedro Creek into both an effective flood-control channel and a linear park involved numerous engineering challenges. For over two centuries, San Pedro Creek has been the focus of efforts to prevent flood water from overflowing the creek's banks. The San Pedro Creek Culture Park (SPCCP) brings hope of a final solution to flood prevention as well as an appealing new attraction to the city which is revitalizing its borders with development. To accomplish these feats, engineers were tasked with increasing channel capacity, improving water quality, rebuilding bridges, and incorporating aesthetic features. These tasks were particularly challenging when working in the central business district of a 300-year-old city.

First and foremost, San Pedro Creek must be able to handle the intermittent flooding from rain, for which San Antonio is known. While the San Pedro Creek flood tunnel significantly reduces the risk of a catastrophic flood event, there remained areas between the inlet and outlet shafts of the tunnel that were still at risk because of the creek's narrow width and shallow depth. The SPCCP corrected this problem by widening and deepening the channel in order to increase channel capacity. To do this, however, engineers and project management had to overcome numerous obstacles. First, negotiations had to be initiated with businesses whose parking lots and buildings were being encroached. Once excavations began, work frequently came to a halt as thousands of archaeological artifacts and foundations of long-forgotten structures were discovered. Sections of channel walls—which would be easier to replace than save, from an engineering standpoint—were instead carefully preserved as relics. New walls were constructed to accommodate the channel's increased dimensions. To support some of these walls, tightly spaced concrete piers were poured, extending as much as 60 feet underground.

Channel widening also led to the replacement of eight bridges. This had to be done as quickly as possible to mitigate disruption to commerce and traffic, and it involved moving the utility lines mounted beneath the bridges to their new locations buried beneath the channel. Other utilities were found by surprise because they were not known to exist or because drawings were inaccurate. Some of these utility lines had been abandoned, while others were still active. Occasionally, the owner or function of a utility line was a mystery until that service was severed.

More recent additions to the channel were also dealt with; one dozen electric scooters were recovered from the creek by the end of 2018.

Since the Project involved working in an active flood channel, engineers had to create a solution to mitigate jobsite flooding. A dam was created across the channel, eight feet below grade. Pumps were installed to lift rainwater (which collected in perforated pipes) over the dam and into

the finished portion of the creek channel. This system was tested when four inches of rain fell in August 2017. The eleven feet of water that submerged a section of the job site were pumped out by the next morning, saving many days of construction downtime.



Massive, densely placed, underground concrete piers used to meet engineering challenges in Phase 1.2 of the SPCCP (by Toxey/McMillan Design Associates)

The section of creek downstream from the tunnel outlet shaft is offered no protection from the tunnel. This area was at greatest risk from flooding. The SPCCP project addressed this less urbanized section of the creek by increasing its water capacity, as well. Most of the 30 acres that the project removed from the floodplain was located along this section.

Creek flow is controlled through the park by pumping water into the creek from the bypass tunnel. To maintain a sufficient quantity of water in the creek, primarily for aesthetic reasons but also to support aquatic flora and fauna, three gates were added to impound water. These gates, one each at Travis, Nueva, and Alamo streets, create impoundment zones that widen the water-surface area and prevent water from flowing downstream too quickly.

To maintain water quality sufficient to support flora and fauna—and safe for children wading in Plaza de Fundación—stormwater is treated with nature-mimicking bioswales and bioretention and with CDS® systems. Near Houston Street, the channel walls and channel bed were lined with concrete to prevent leeching of contaminants into the stream water from the soil, a legacy of the San Antonio Gas Company, which was once located on the site where the Alameda Theater now stands.

Harnessing the waters of a creek as it flows downtown through a city situated within the notorious Flash Flood Alley of Central Texas would be challenging enough. Recognizing the opportunity to create much more than just an effective drainage ditch, county leaders tasked engineers to come up with solutions to the challenges of transforming a drainage ditch into a park, with visitor accessibility, maintained water flow, and improved water quality. Further widening the channel to create creek-side paseos The SPCCP team not only managed to do that, but they also created a significant enhancement to the cultural amenities of San Antonio and Bexar County and a welcome respite from the urban environment above. The planting of over 15,000 plants, shrubs, and trees, and over 31,000 square feet of ground cover in phase 1.1 alone help turn this former drainage ditch into a lush and beautiful linear park.

MEDIA PLAN AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This interpretive plan will be used to guide the development and design of the media suggested below.

1. PUBLIC ART

The interpretive program for the SPCCP runs parallel with the San Pedro Creek Public Art program, and they share the goal of interpreting the creek and its history for public access and enjoyment. It is the intent of this plan to be used by the artists selected to produce location-specific installations in the park in order to help them define topics and locations for their pieces and to provide research background and resources for their chosen topics.

2. EXTERIOR INTERPRETIVE SIGN SERIES

We recommended developing approximately 47 interpretive panels between Houston Street Bridge and the southern end of the park (i.e., phases 1.2–4.0). The panels, as shown in the Storyline Development, above, cover (1) historical and social topics tied to the creek; (2) descriptions of native flora planted in the park and the fauna that find food and shelter there; and (3) descriptions of the engineered features that make the park possible. The panels will include text, photographs, diagrams, and maps.

We further recommend that the panels be designed in the same way and using the same materials and methods of those developed in Phase 1.1, with the exception of language. The San Pedro Creek Culture Park Interpretive Plan Committee recommended that the panels be developed in both English and Spanish.

3. BRIDGE SIGN SERIES

Because the bridges crossing the creek and the names of the streets that they extend are tied closely to the urban history of the creek, we recommend including a small plaque on each of the 10 main bridges crossing the creek in phases 1.2–4.0 that reveal the history and meaning of their names. A brief treatment of these is included in the Storyline Development.

4. MOBILE APP

A further purpose of the Interpretive Plan is to provide content for the rich and layered mobile app that was developed for Phase 1.1. so that it can be extended with the later phases of park development. The three themes of the interpretive panel series (history, nature, and engineering/design) (complemented by the related public art program) were conceived with the

mobile app in mind and its discovery tours that fall into the categories of art, nature, and culture. Since many of the engineering elements impact water quality and the ability of the water to support ecosystems, we recommend that the engineering topics be grouped with the nature topics in app's tours, if not developed into a fourth tour topic.

5. WEBSITE

This Interpretive Plan is also intended to provide content for the park website, which has already been established, so that its scope, like that of the mobile app, can be extended as the park extends. This is a venue for unlimited additional information about the SPCCP, the creek, and the history of the region.

6. AUGMENTED REALITY EXPERIENCES

Leveraging the developing technology of augmented reality can allow for some exciting interpretive opportunities along the San Pedro Creek Culture Park. Using a smart phones or tablet as a view portal, a visitor could stand in the middle of a historic event. This technology could also be used to show how a place along the creek transformed from a quiet stream to a residential and garden environment, perhaps witnessed a revolutionary war, turned into an industrial setting, became a drainage ditch, and was reborn again as a beautiful park.

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Monica Treviño-Ortega, SARA
Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, historian



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the **San Pedro Creek Culture Park**, please contact the following:

Website: <https://spcculturepark.com>

Project Information Line: (210) 302-3652

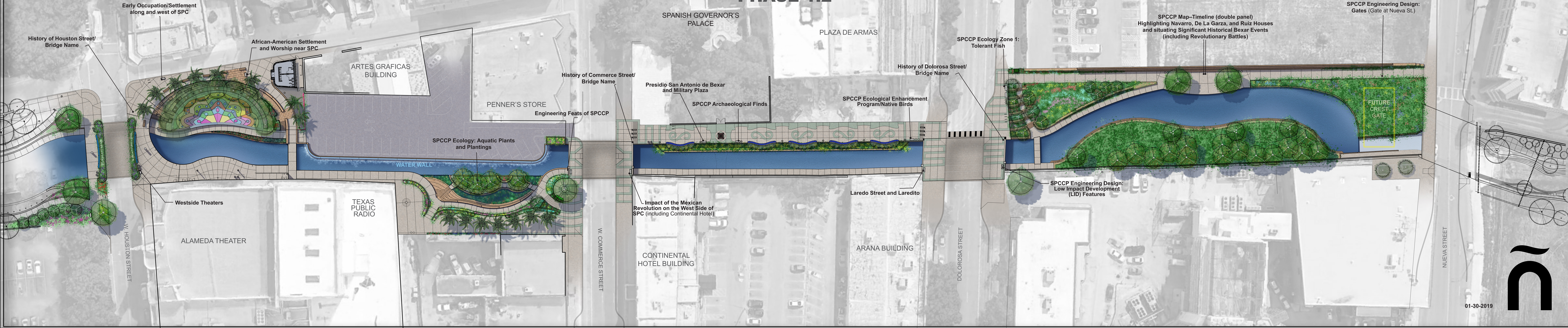
Email: SanPedroCreek@sara-tx.org

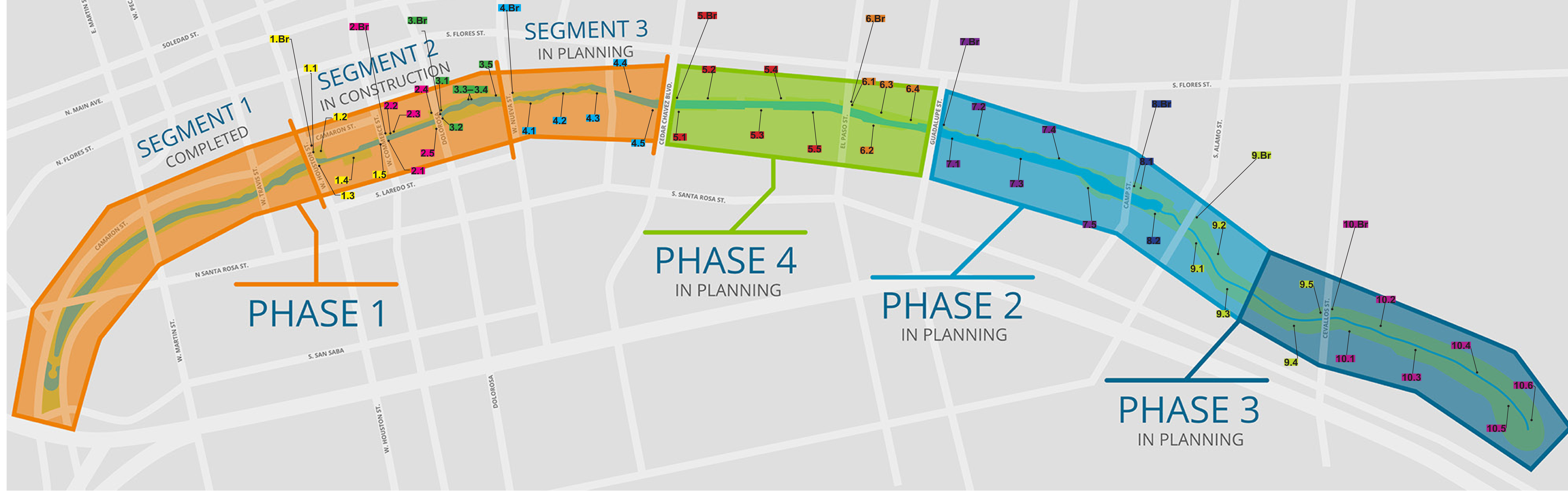
Address: 715 Camaron Street, San Antonio, TX 78204



SAN PEDRO CREEK CULTURE PARK

PHASE 1.2





San Pedro Creek and the Saga of a City

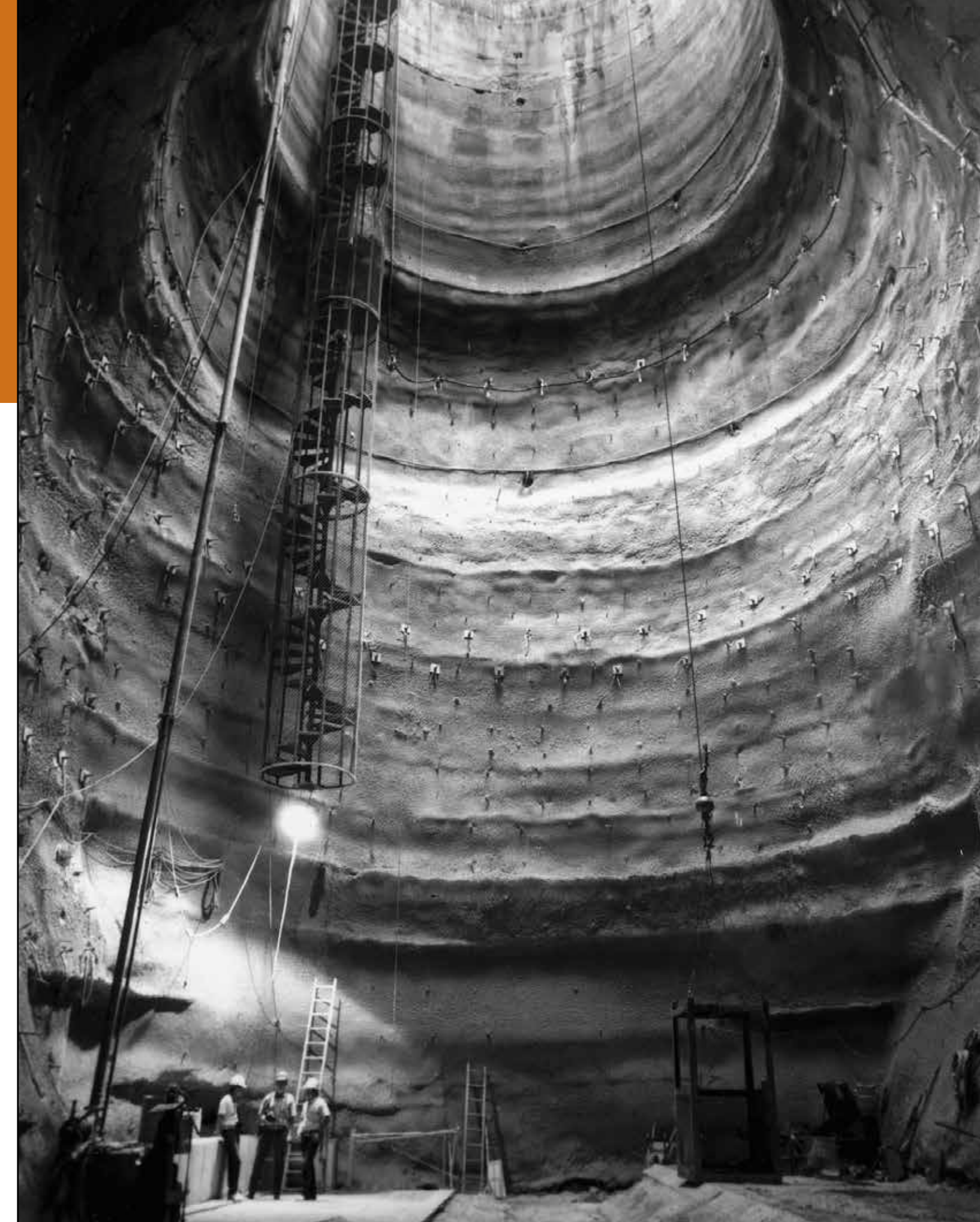
How did a humble creek at the edge of Nueva España become a crossroads of many nations?



Painting: Theodore Gentilz; Courtesy: San Antonio Museum of Art.

THE EPIC STORY OF SAN ANTONIO DE BÉXAR begins with these waters. They were a source of sustenance and refreshment for the first peoples here, many thousands of years before Europeans arrived. History records the stories of the first encounters between the Indian and Spanish worlds that took place near here, beginning in the 1690s and culminating in May of 1718 with a settlement that would become San Antonio and Bexar County. From that moment, a great American city would eventually emerge. For its three hundred years, this place has always been a crossroads of cultures, a meeting place for peoples of the world.

The San Pedro Creek Culture Park commemorates the human saga of San Antonio, a community founded in the era of Nueva España and later adopted into the American republic. It is a tale that begins in a natural setting, evolves into a mission town at the edge of a burgeoning empire, and becomes a cosmic American city that anticipates much of what America is becoming: a place of all nations, a refuge of hope and promise in an uncertain world. The story you will follow along the creek tells the tale of how this place became San Antonio, *la ciudad cosmica*.



Courtesy: San Antonio River Authority Archive, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

Both the San Pedro Creek and San Antonio River flood control tunnels were constructed using a boring machine or “mole.” The mole was assembled underground and bored from the outlet shaft upstream to the inlet shaft. The tunnels were lined with precast concrete panels as the mole advanced. This photograph shows the outlet shaft for the San Pedro Creek tunnel.

A Chronicle of Floods and Their Legacy of Calamities

NATURE NURTURES OUR COMMUNITIES, but it can also cause great destruction. This creek, that served as the cradle of first settlement in 1718 together with its tributary streams on San Antonio’s west side, caused heavy loss of life and property, particularly as the city grew in the 1800s and 1900s. Early efforts to remedy flooding by widening and straightening the creeks altered their age-old natural appearance but helped to control devastating flood waters. By the late 1900s, the San Antonio River Authority and United States Army Corps of Engineers determined that the most efficient and affordable way to protect downtown San Antonio from flooding would be to construct underground bypass tunnels on both the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek. The San Pedro Creek tunnel was first to be built. Begun in 1987, the tunnel was completed in 1991. In times of deluge, raging waters enter the tunnel at the inlet shaft near here, plummet 140 feet into a 24-foot-diameter tunnel, then surge forward over a mile to an outlet at Guadalupe Street, south of downtown. Flood waters then emerge into the surface channel that courses turbulently downstream to the creek’s confluence with the San Antonio River.



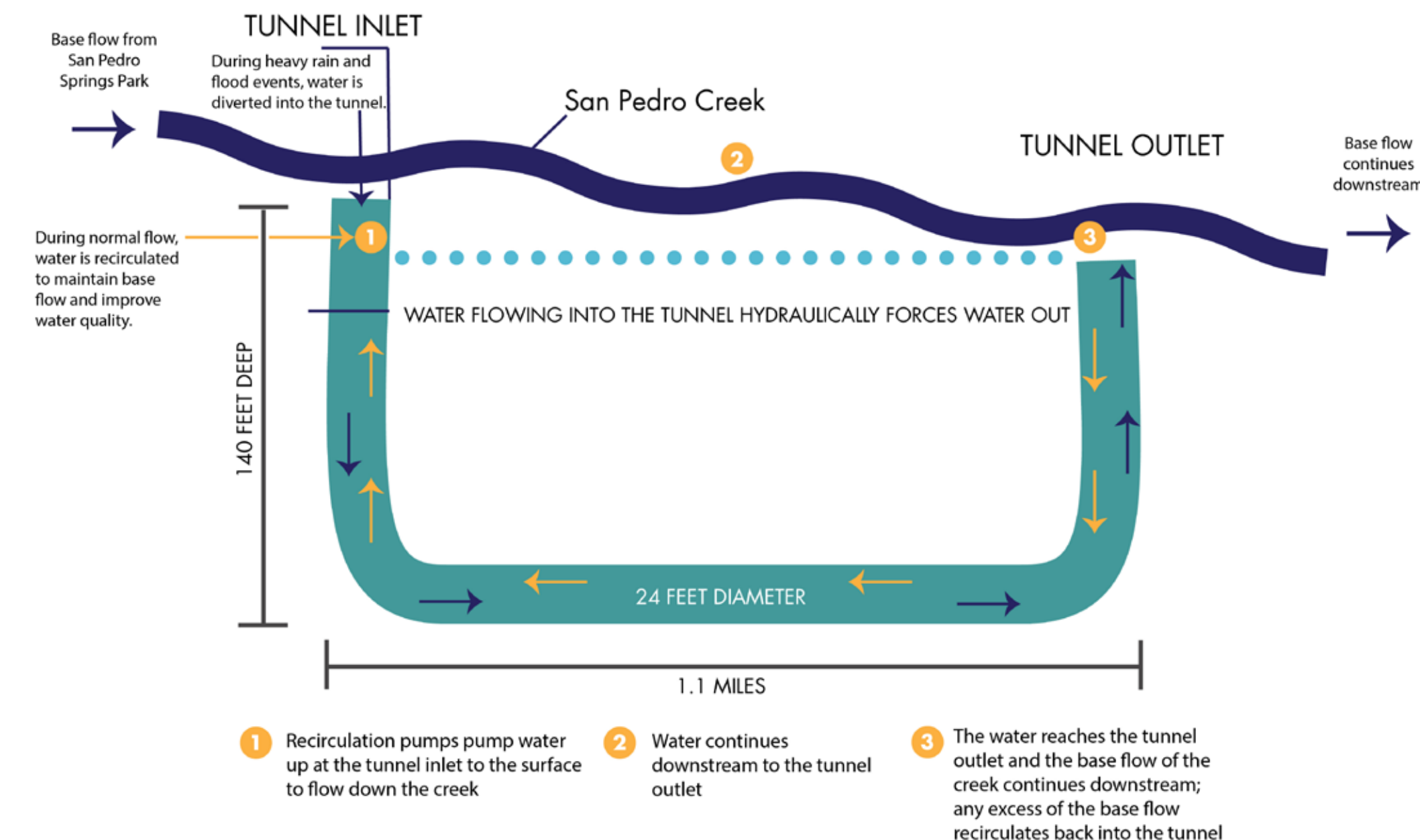
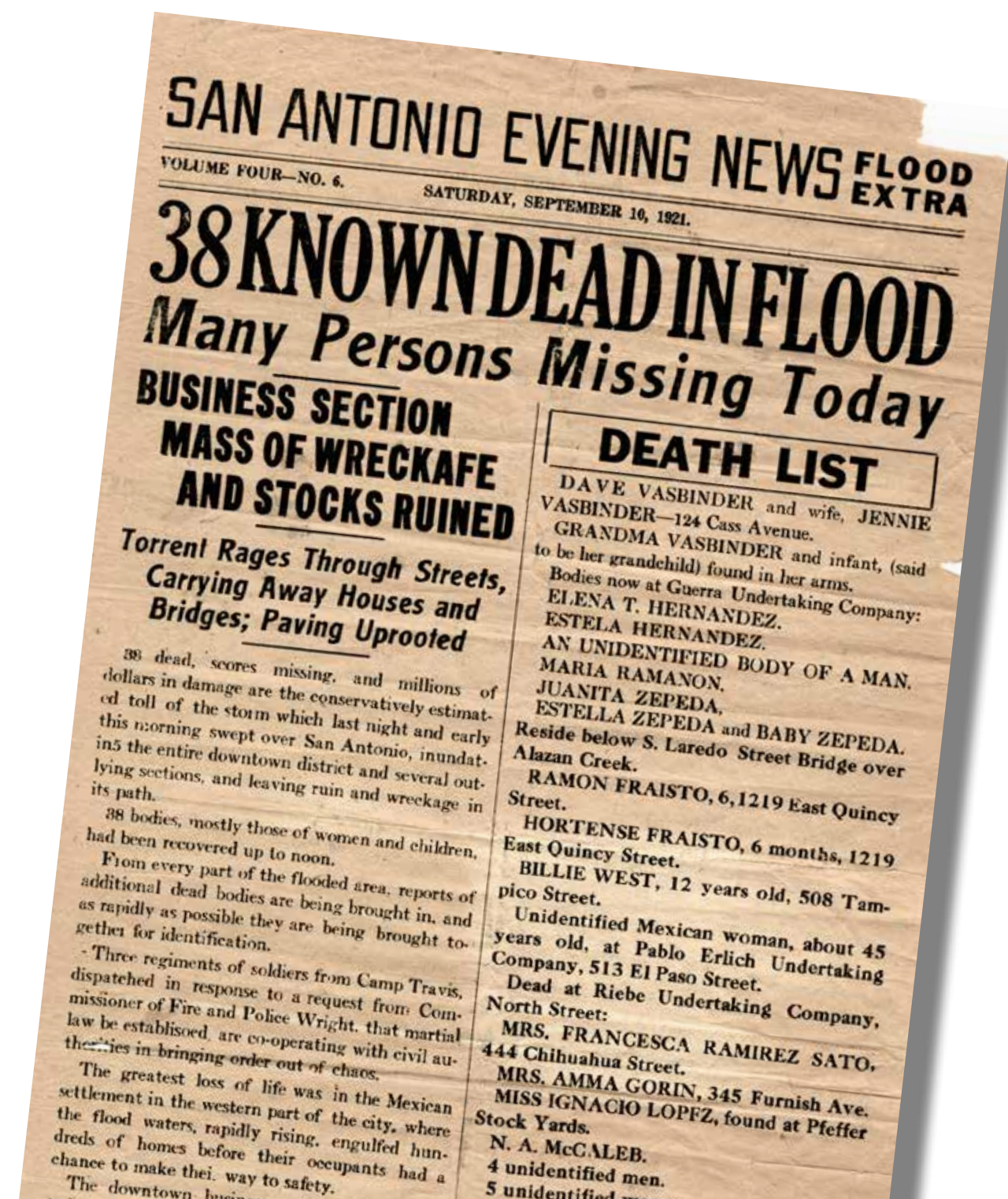
Courtesy: University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

Flooding was widespread in neighborhoods along San Pedro Creek. The Finesilver clothing manufacturing plant on the creek’s east bank was one of many properties damaged in the 1921 flood.

Engineering, technology, and great labor were needed to protect the city from periodic deluges.

The flood of September 1921 caused significant loss of life and damage in both the downtown area and neighborhoods adjoining the river and west side creeks. Torrents of water overflowed the banks, destroying commercial buildings and washing away houses. Of the 51 confirmed deaths, all but four occurred along the San Pedro, Alazán, and other west side creeks.

Source: San Antonio Evening News, September 18, 1921.
Courtesy: DRT Collection at Texas A&M University–San Antonio.



Courtesy: San Antonio River Authority.

The flow of San Pedro Creek remains in its surface channel under normal conditions. However in times of flooding, excess water is diverted into an underground tunnel to bypass the heavily developed downtown area. On the other hand, during dry periods when springs feeding the creek slow or cease flowing, water pumped out of the tunnel at its upstream end flows downstream through the surface channel, then returns to the tunnel at its outlet shaft to once again be recycled.

San Pedro Creek: A Crossroads of Cultures



Painting: Theodore Gentilz; Courtesy: Witte Museum, San Antonio.

Indigenous people hunted, fished, and camped along area streams for thousands of years before Spanish explorers arrived in the late 1600s. Camp of the Lipan depicts a similar scene outside of San Antonio in the late 19th century.

From its earliest encounters between people of all nations, Béxar became a mestizo community, a place where our humanity was transformed.

GEOLOGICAL TIME DWARFS human time, but the two are closely intertwined. For millennia San Pedro Springs have risen to the surface from a deep, purifying underground aquifer. These abundant waters once formed a swiftly flowing creek that sustained myriad indigenous peoples for 12,000 years before the Spanish arrived to establish a permanent settlement here in 1718. Following the settlement of families from Spain's Canary Islands in 1731, land along San Pedro Creek was apportioned among them by royal land grants for farming and collective grazing. Gradually a community of Spanish soldiers, civilians, indigenous, and diverse mestizo (mixed) residents developed along the creek. These early settlers would be joined, beginning in the 1820s, by colonists from the United States and Europe who came seeking land and opportunity in Texas, then still part of Mexico. The influx of new residents accelerated after Texas became an independent republic in 1836 and a state in 1845.

San Antonio became a frontier community of many nations where Native Americans, Mexicans, Germans, French, Poles, Lebanese, Italians, and African Americans lived and worked side by side. Many of these communities mixed with others, and San Antonio became increasingly mestizo. But as other ethnic divides widened, San Pedro Creek would eventually become a boundary line between the emerging city's Anglo and Mexican enclaves. The neighborhood here on the creek's upper reach was home to many Italian immigrants who sold produce and other traditional specialties at the nearby municipal market. Members of this vibrant community formed the Christopher Columbus Italian Society in 1890 and built San Francesco di Paola Church and the adjoining parish hall in 1927. Though much of this neighborhood was demolished when expressways were constructed beginning in the 1940s, this area along San Pedro Creek is considered to be the center of San Antonio's Italian community.

Large numbers of European immigrants arrived in San Antonio in the mid-to-late 1800s seeking new opportunities. Many settled along and near San Pedro Creek including French artist Theodore Gentilz and his wife Marie, seen here in front of their home on North Flores Street just east of the creek.



Courtesy: DRT Collection at Texas A&M University-San Antonio.



Courtesy: Marilyn Magaro, San Antonio.

Italian merchants operated stores nearby and sold vegetables and other goods at San Antonio's municipal market, a short distance south of here.



Courtesy: DRT Collection at Texas A&M University-San Antonio.

In the 1800s the main thoroughfare west of the creek was Laredo Street, and the area became informally known as Laredito. La Esperanza Grocery No. 3 near San Pedro Creek on North Laredo Street was typical of the small businesses operated by the area's residents.

Birth of a Community

The chronicle of encounters over decades and centuries tells the story of a city's beginnings and emergence.



In the late 1600s the Spanish mounted several expeditions across the Rio Grande to the eastern edge of New Spain, founding missions and presidios to counter the French and to convert the natives to Christianity. This map, by presidial commander Luis Antonio Menchaca in 1764, shows the San Antonio community from the headwaters of the river to its confluence with the Medina River.

BEGINNING IN THE 1680s, 160 years after the conquest of Mexico, several Spanish expeditions entered the still uncharted interior of Texas from Mexico to counter French activity in East Texas and along the Gulf Coast.

On June 13, 1691, an expedition led by Governor Domingo Terán arrived at a Payaya Indian *ranchería* on a beautiful spring-fed river. The Indians called the place Yanaguana. The Spanish named the river San Antonio because it was

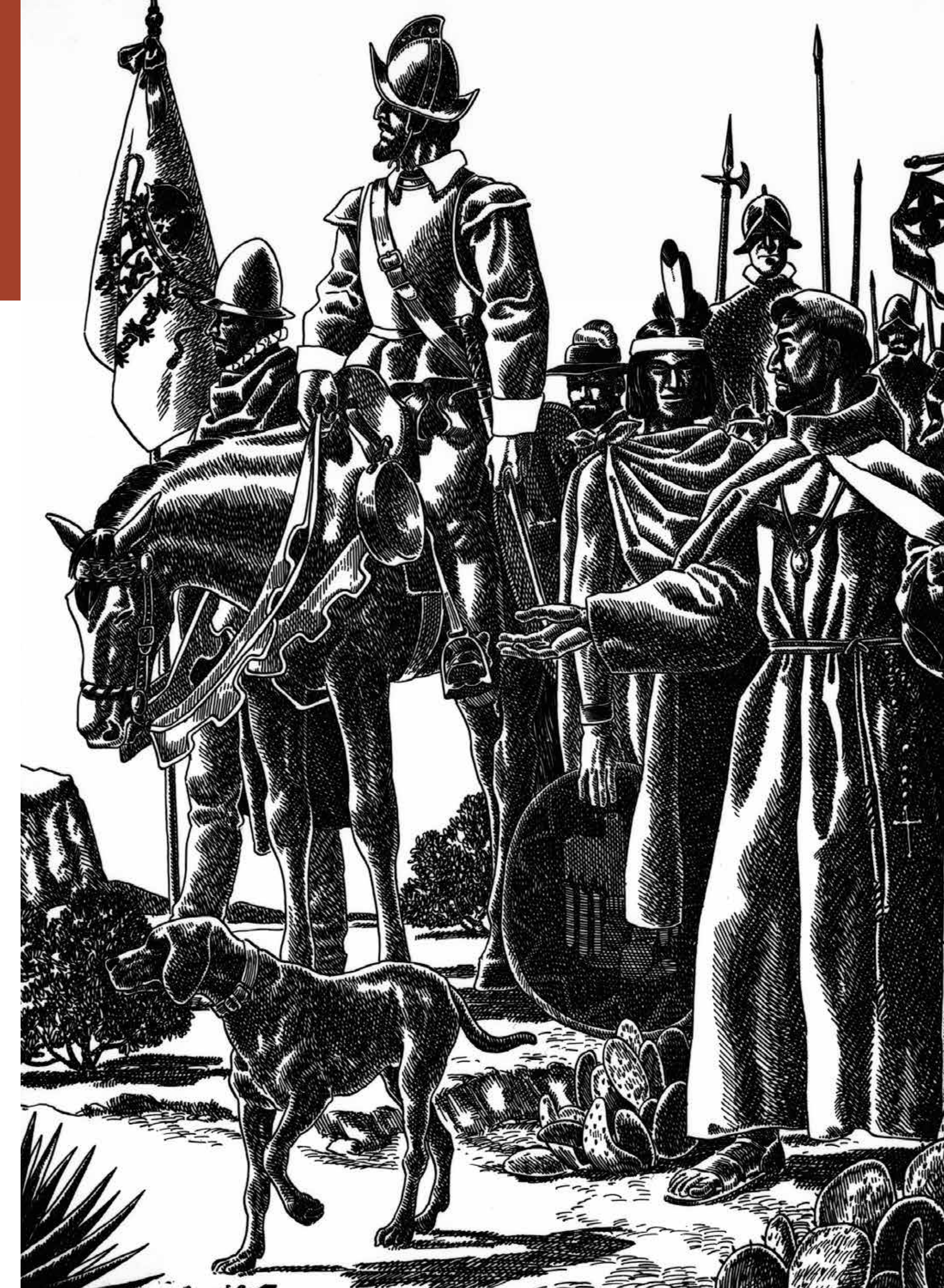


Following establishment of the mission and presidio and the arrival of more settlers, Spanish officials allocated land for homes and farms. The community's first surveyors used ropes and rocks to measure and mark lot boundaries, while in later years more sophisticated instruments were used including the surveyor's cross depicted in this historical painting.

the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua. Eighteen years later, when the next Spanish expedition, with Capitán Pedro de Aguirre and Fray Antonio Olivares, visited the area on April 13, 1709, it stopped at a lush spring just west of the river and named it San Pedro Springs. Nine years later the viceroy of New Spain, the Marqués de Valero, authorized Governor Martín de Alarcón to establish a way station on the San Antonio River between Mission San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande and Spanish missions in East Texas. The Alarcón expedition arrived along the creek flowing from San Pedro Springs in late April 1718 and selected a site for Mission San Antonio de Valero, which was turned over to Franciscan missionary Fray Antonio Olivares on May 1. Four days later Alarcón founded the Presidio San Antonio de B́exar near the springs. These events marked the establishment of the isolated settlement that survived, grew, and prospered to become the City of San Antonio and Bexar County.

Spanish expeditions into Texas generally included Franciscan priests who established missions for the indigenous population, soldiers who established presidios to protect the missions, and Indian guides and laborers. New Spain included all of modern Mexico, most of Central America, and the American Southwest.

Drawing: José Cisneros; Courtesy: University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.



The Taming of San Pedro Creek



Courtesy: *Light* Collection, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections and Hearst Corporation.

San Pedro Creek was reconfigured to accommodate construction of the city's expressway system in 1949. This work involved filling in the natural channel (above) and building a new concrete-lined channel (below).



Courtesy: *Express-News* Collection, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections and Hearst Corporation.

THE PRISTINE AND LUSH natural setting of the primordial creek, with its riparian abundance of flora and fauna, would change dramatically as the town grew in the mid-to-late 1800s. Though garden plots and grazing land along the creek and nearby streets would give way to building sites for houses and businesses, the creek itself remained largely unchanged until the early 1900s. But the periodic floods that damaged adjacent properties and claimed lives worsened in 1917 when the creek was channeled into an overly narrow underground culvert downstream from here to facilitate construction of the terminal for the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad (known as the M-K-T or the Katy). City leaders later made plans to widen the creek in order to speed the passage of flood water. Depression-era programs funded work to straighten the creek and line its walls with stone and concrete to prevent collapse. The course of San Pedro Creek

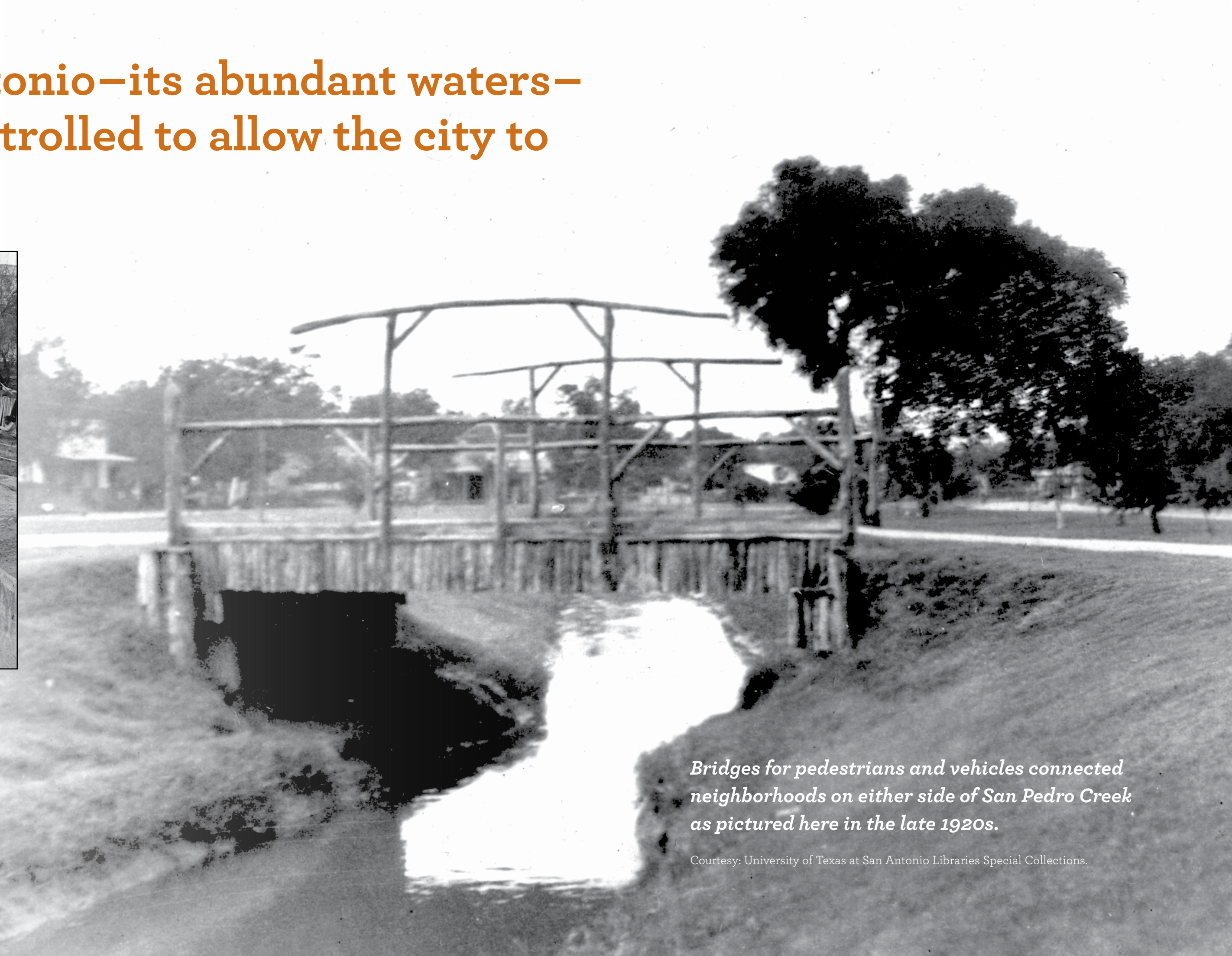
that had emerged over thousands of years, was gradually transformed from a natural waterway into a concrete drainage ditch, a process that continued in the 1940s when the channel was re-directed to accommodate highway construction. By 1951 ongoing urban development and subsequent worsening flooding led to adoption of the San Antonio River Channel Improvement Project. This monumental effort would address 31 miles of waterway improvements throughout the city, including along San Pedro Creek. Work to widen, deepen, and straighten the creek south of downtown was finished in the mid-1970s, and the San Pedro Creek flood bypass tunnel, designed to protect the downtown area, was completed in 1991. Completion of this tunnel made it possible to establish a world-class linear culture park and restore the onetime splendor of the creek's aquatic environment. The waters of San Pedro Creek flow in beauty once again.

The original blessing of San Antonio—its abundant waters—would eventually have to be controlled to allow the city to grow and flourish.



Courtesy: *Light* Collection, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections and Hearst Corporation.

Relief workers were employed during the Depression to build concrete walls along San Pedro Creek to contain flood waters. Laborers constructed walls downstream from this site near today's César Chávez Boulevard.



Bridges for pedestrians and vehicles connected neighborhoods on either side of San Pedro Creek as pictured here in the late 1920s.

Courtesy: University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

The Living Worlds of San Pedro Creek

Suddenly, in the midst of an arid landscape of dire challenges, here was an unexpected oasis – brimming with life.



Courtesy: Light Collection, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections and Hearst Corporation.

Large bigclaw river shrimp were once found in the San Antonio River drainage. This one, held by Marguerite Goodspeed, was caught in 1927.

THE FIRST SPANISH EXPLORERS to arrive in the environs of San Pedro Creek and the nearby San Antonio River attested to a panorama of natural beauty and abundance, full of promise as a place to create a lasting settlement. San Pedro Creek drains a watershed of about 45 square miles on San Antonio's west side. Along most of its course, the creek closely parallels the San Antonio River to the east, and its major tributaries – Martínez, Alazán, and Apache creeks – feed into it from the west. Spanish explorers, who camped by the creek three hundred years ago, reported ample, high quality water, lush vegetation, and plentiful game and fish in the area.

For early settlers the area was an oasis in the otherwise arid landscape. In its natural state, the creek provided habitat for a wide variety of aquatic plants and animals. Over time, weather cycles caused extreme floods that carved new channels, altered banks, and resulted in loss of life and property, while drought killed vegetation and caused wildlife to relocate. Beginning in the early 1900s, in an effort to alleviate devastating flooding, the channel was straightened, widened, and lined with stone and concrete, banks were sloped, and vegetation was removed. Though efforts to tame the creek were generally successful, they resulted in the unfortunate

loss of natural habitat and changed the relationship between residents of adjoining neighborhoods and the creek. The San Pedro Creek Improvements Project, one of several major stream enhancement efforts by Bexar County, the City of San Antonio, and the San Antonio River Authority, returned the creek to a more natural state while maintaining flood control. The revitalized creek provides improved water quality, increased biological diversity, and renewed opportunities for people to enjoy this historic urban waterway and reflect on its extraordinary legacy.



Source: animalspot.net.

Yellow-crowned night herons are large birds that inhabit most wetlands from coastal marshes to wooded streams. These ambush predators patiently watch from the creek banks, waiting to grab a crawfish or other prey. While primarily nocturnal, these birds also feed during the day.



Photo: Terry Hibbitts, Camp Wood.

The Guadalupe spiny soft-shelled turtle is found only in the San Antonio and Nueces river drainages of South Central Texas. It is totally dependent on the streams where it lives, leaving the water only to bask and lay eggs. Soft-shells feed on fish and other aquatic animals.



Bald Cypress

Source: Wikipedia; Courtesy: Creative Commons.



Mealy Blue Sage

Photo: Andy and Sally Wasowski, Taos, New Mexico; Courtesy: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin.



Yellow Pond Lily

Photo: Alan Cressler, Atlanta, Georgia; Courtesy: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin.



Pickerelweed

Courtesy: San Antonio River Authority.

Plants are an important part of the creek ecosystem. Some plants such as yellow pond lily have leaves that float on the water's surface. Other plants such as pickerelweed emerge out of shallow water with their leaves and flowers extending above the water surface. Bald cypress are majestic trees that grow along creeks and rivers and can reach heights of 75 feet or taller. Mealy blue sage is a perennial wildflower that grows in the riparian environment. These plants provide shade, cover, and food for wildlife including pollinators and birds.

Early Industry Along San Pedro Creek

FIRST SOAP WORKS

Simon Menger's soap works and surrounding buildings on the west bank of San Pedro Creek were illustrated by Augustus Koch in 1873. In this view north is at the bottom.

Source: "Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. 1873."

These ancient waters also served as a resource for San Antonio's first entrepreneurs and aspiring industrialists.

SAN PEDRO CREEK was an invaluable source of water for residents who lived and farmed and grazed their livestock along its banks. The creek also provided water for businesses that manufactured a variety of products for the local market. The ingenious German immigrant Simon Menger, a music teacher by profession, purchased a soap-making business on the creek south of this site in 1851.

He expanded the facility and advertised himself as a "manufacturer of soap, tallow candles and vinegar." After his factory was badly damaged by a flood in 1859, Menger began purchasing property further upstream and reestablished his business here on the west bank of San Pedro Creek. Simon and Augusta Louise Menger raised their family in the home they built adjoining the factory. S. Menger and Sons, later known as the

San Antonio Soap Works, manufactured products for household and commercial uses and by the late 1870s sold over 25,000 pounds of soap per month. As their father grew older, Erich Menger managed the

San Antonio business and August oversaw a branch factory in Houston. Erich purchased the soap works in 1882 and continued operating the business here until the early 1900s. The building was later used as a broom factory, printing shop, and apartments. Like other landmarks of early city history, the soap works was abandoned to decades of disuse. After surviving years of neglect, it was eventually threatened with demolition by the Urban Renewal program, only to be saved by the San Antonio Conservation Society in 1970. This historic structure, San Antonio's earliest remaining industrial building, was restored and incorporated into the nearby Soap Works Apartment complex. Part of the creek's long history lives within its walls.

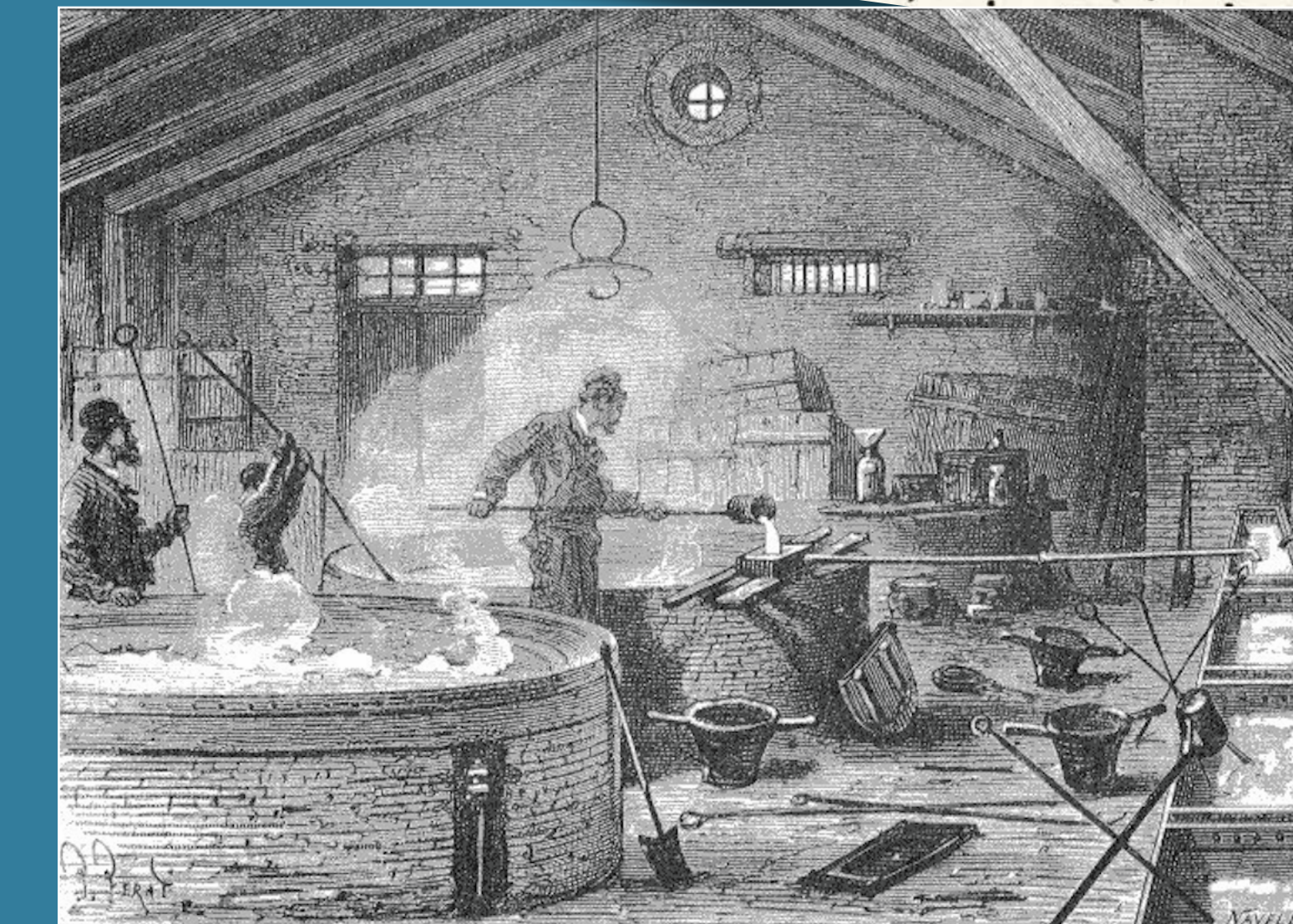
The Menger family posed for a photographer in front of their soap factory in the late 1880s.



Courtesy: Tracy Hammer, San Antonio.



Source: Morrison and Fourmy's General Directory of the City of San Antonio for 1881-82.



Source: Grands Hommes et Grands Faits de l'Industrie, published in France about 1880.

Soap was made by heating a mixture of animal fat from local butchers, lye, and acid with water from the creek, then cooling it in wooden frames.

A Living Heritage: City Streets and the Legacy of Early Settlers

Today's bridges and street names contain hidden annals of San Antonio's deep history.

THE STREETS AND BRIDGES that span San Pedro Creek define the modern city. But they also echo the legacies of the early settler families of New Spain who built their dwellings on land granted to them by Spanish authorities in the 1700s. *Herencia* (heritage) is alive here. These pioneer residents drew water from the creek and nearby acequia, a hand-dug irrigation channel that delivered water from San Pedro Springs to nearby fields and homes. Their descendants inherited irrigated farms and homesteads, which were sold and subdivided as the town prospered and grew outward from the creek banks in the mid-1800s. Early unpaved streets were named, in Spanish, to reflect landscape features and known landmarks of the era. Among this array of early streets were Acequia (for the irrigation channel), Campo Santo (for the burial ground west of San Pedro Creek), Nogales (for pecan trees growing near the creek), Obraje (for adobe workshops in the area), and Arroyo San Pedro (the street alongside the creek). As the city grew and populations shifted in size and influence, some street names were changed to commemorate prominent residents and historical figures.

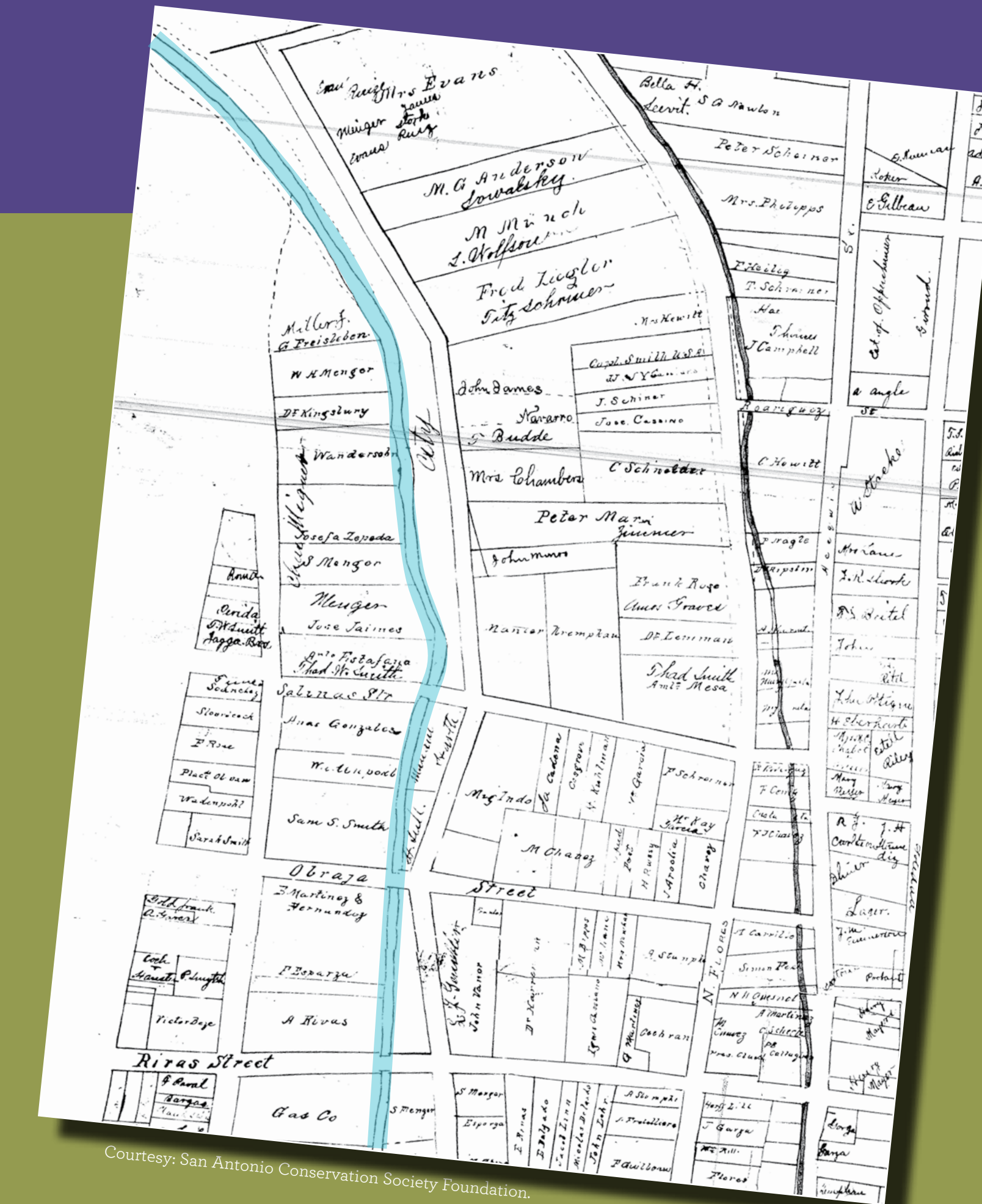
Campo Santo became Rivas, and Nogales was renamed Salinas—both recognizing influential families. Later, city streets would be renamed for heroes of the Texas Revolution, signalling shifting influence and power. Obraje became Travis Street in remembrance of William Barret Travis, commander of Texas troops at the Battle of the Alamo, and Rivas was changed to Houston Street to

honor Sam Houston, the Texas army general who became the first president of the Republic of Texas. Though most of the adobe and stone buildings that served as tangible reminders of San Antonio's past had disappeared by the 21st century, downtown street names still carry the memory of our city's long, deep, and richly layered history.



Courtesy: James Lifshutz, San Antonio.

Mariano García and his wife, Tomasa Chávez, built their home on Nogales (later Salinas) Street in the middle 1850s. The house was enlarged as their family grew. It was the home of García's foster grandson, Adolph Garza Jr., until 1981 when it was sold and converted into offices. The house is seen here as it appeared in the 1970s.

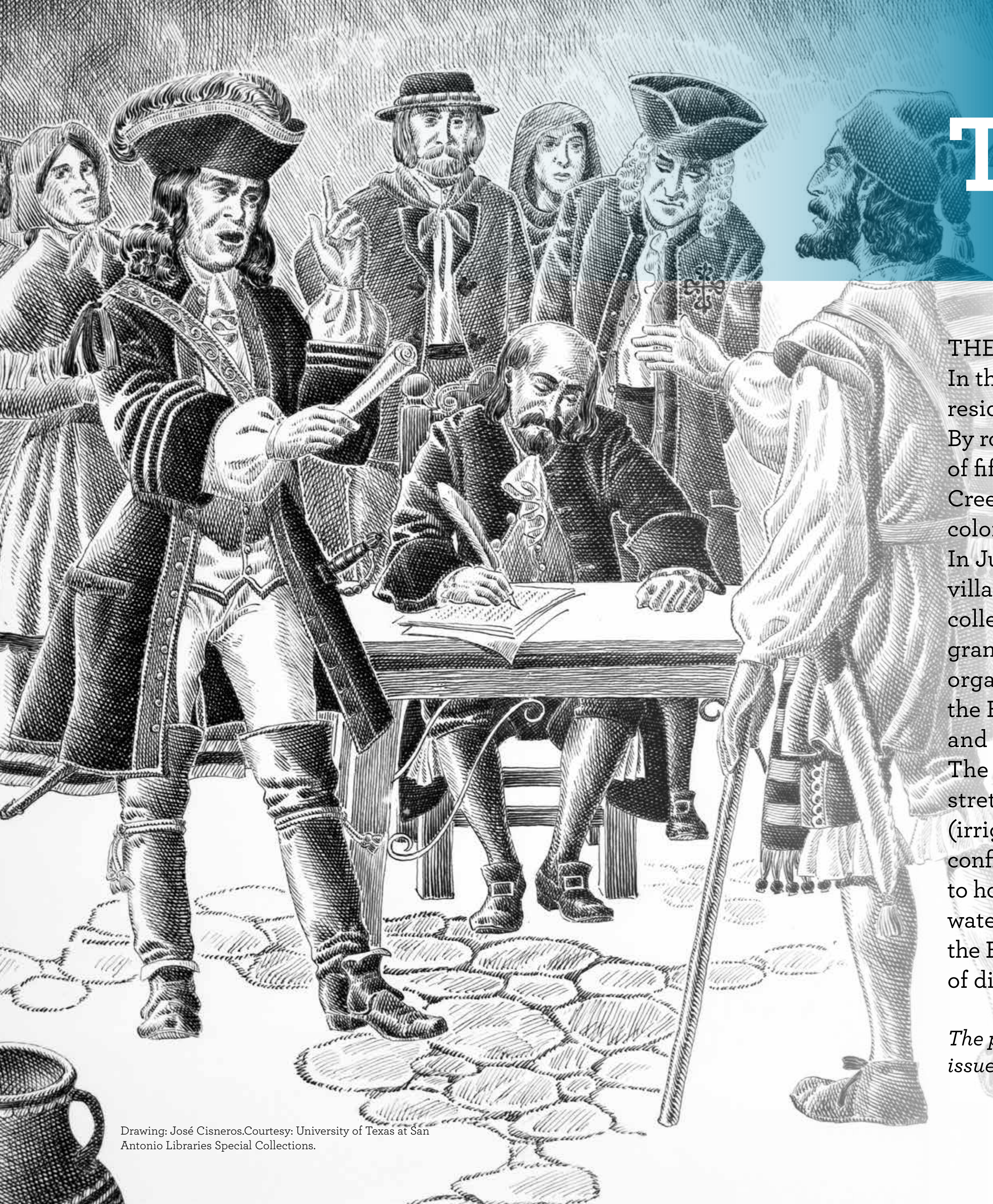


Courtesy: San Antonio Conservation Society Foundation.

By the late 1800s streets and bridges spanned San Pedro Creek, and the land had been subdivided among many property owners.

Those who owned property and lived along the creek in this area included members of the Chávez, García, Garza, and Mojaras families. Prominent rancher Juan Antonio Chávez, who was born near San Pedro Creek in 1827 and died nearby on Obraje Street in 1911, witnessed the colonial town grow to become a modern city.

Source: Twentieth Century History of Southwest Texas, 1907.



The Barrio del Norte

Out of its origins in Nueva España, independent Mexico, and Texas, an American city took shape.

THE COMMUNITY GREW SLOWLY in the years after its founding in 1718. In the earliest years of this community of New Spain, military and civilian residents intermingled, and there was no organized civilian settlement. By royal decree, municipal government was formalized in 1731 upon the arrival of fifteen families from the Canary Islands. Because land west of San Pedro Creek lacked irrigation and was often at risk from ongoing Indian attacks, the colonists were settled near the presidio that stood on the creek's east bank. In July 1732 Captain Juan Antonio Pérez de Almazán laid out the new civilian villa that included a central plaza, the *ejido* (a town common), and land for collective grazing and farming (the *labores*). Town and outlying lots were granted to the Isleños (Canary Islander families). As the town grew, it was organized into barrios that would shape and imprint the city's future—the Barrio del Sur, Barrio del Norte, Barrio del Alamo, La Villita, El Portrero, and the Barrio de Laredo, each represented by its own commissioner. The Barrio del Norte included land lying between the creek and river stretching from the town's plazas to just north of this site. An acequia (irrigation channel) dug from San Pedro Springs south to near the creek's confluence with the San Antonio River was completed in 1734 to provide water to homes and farms in the Barrio del Norte. Because of its access to abundant water and proximity to the plazas that were the center of community life, the Barrio del Norte developed into a thriving neighborhood where members of diverse ethnic groups lived and worked side by side.

The presidial commander, Juan Antonio Almazán, issued land titles to settlers from the Canary Islands.

San Antonio was organized into governmental units known as barrios as illustrated on John Rullman's map of the city as it was in 1837. Rullman based his map, published in 1912, on extensive historical research.



Courtesy: Witte Museum, San Antonio.

Plaza de las Armas (Military Plaza) just east of the creek was the site of a vibrant market where residents of the Barrio del Norte gathered throughout the 1800s. This depiction of the market was painted by Thomas Allen in 1878.



Source: "Historical Map of Old San Antonio de Bexar as it was in 1837 or 75 Years Ago."

The Healing Arts West of the Creek

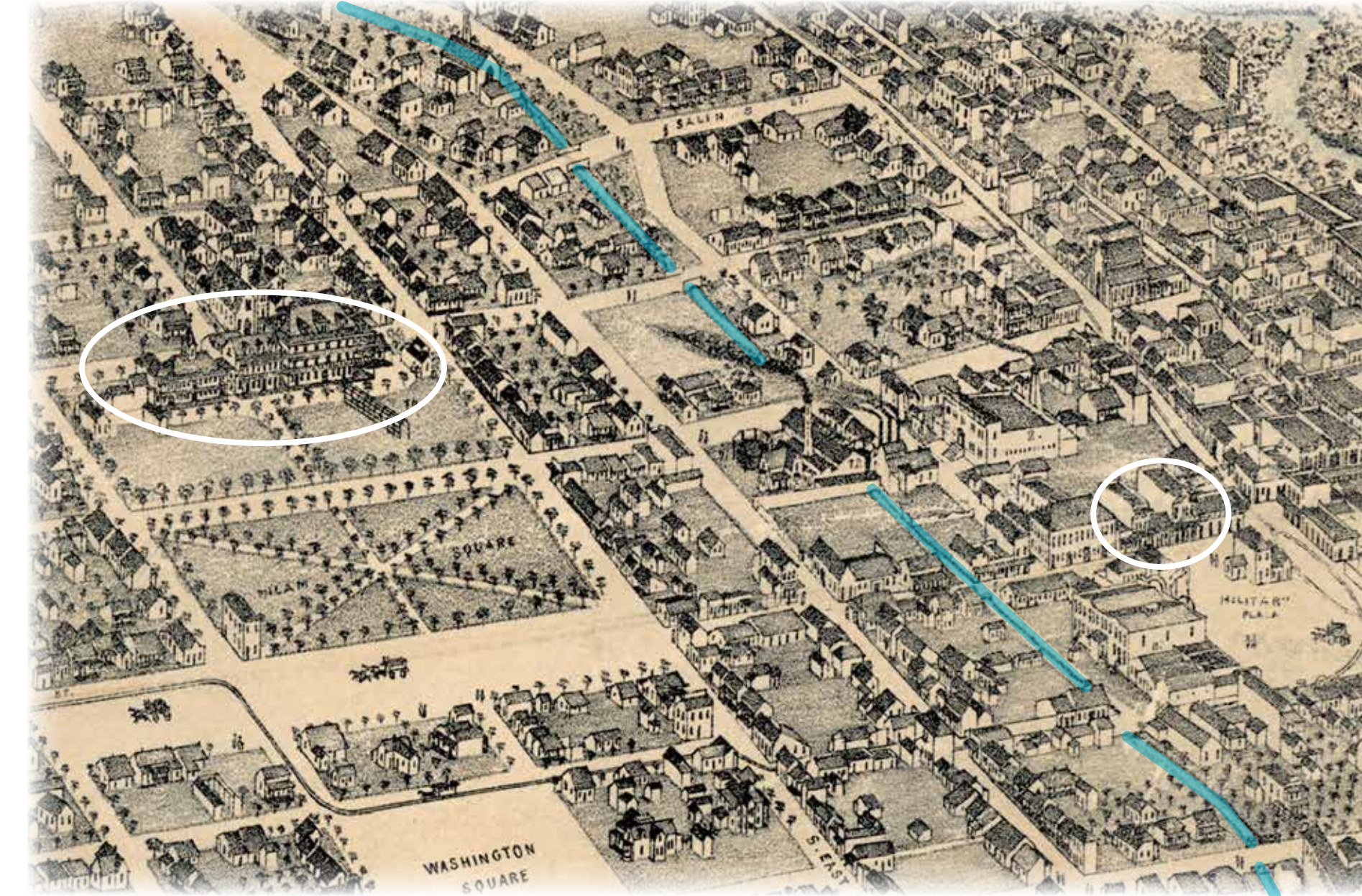
Over the centuries, many healers would find their way to the creek.



The Sisters of Charity worked closely with hospital staff including Dr. Ferdinand Herff and his son, Dr. Adolph Herff, as they performed an operation in about 1900.

Courtesy: Express-News Collection, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections and Hearst Corporation.

AS THE CITY'S POPULATION GREW, communities pursued public health in diverse ways. Health care in San Antonio in the early-to-mid 1800s was administered by private physicians, druggists, and *curanderos* (folk healers). After a cholera epidemic killed hundreds in 1849, the Bexar County Medical Society was founded, and city and county physicians were hired. Construction of a joint city-county hospital was being discussed when another cholera epidemic killed 293 local residents in 1866. Through the efforts of Catholic Bishop Claude Marie Dubuis, Sisters Madeleine Chollet, St. Pierre Cinquin, and Agnes Buisson, members of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, arrived in San Antonio in 1869 to open a small infirmary. Their facility, just east of San Pedro Creek on Military Plaza, served all races and religions regardless of ability to pay. The order also built an orphanage on Houston Street west of the creek. In 1875 the infirmary, later christened Santa Rosa Hospital, moved from the boisterous and noisy plaza to the quieter orphanage site. The sisters worked alongside doctors in all areas of patient treatment and care. The hospital was continuously expanded and modernized to offer new services including specialized health care for children. The facility, today known as Children's Hospital of San Antonio, still cares for patients from throughout South Texas at the site just west of San Pedro Creek where it has fulfilled its health care mission since 1875.



Source: "Bird's Eye View of San Antonio, Bexar Co. Texas 1886. Looking North East."

Augustus Koch illustrated Santa Rosa Hospital (left) on his 1886 bird's-eye view of the city. The site of the infirmary opened on Military Plaza in 1869 can also be seen (right). Both were located near San Pedro Creek, which flows between the two locations.



Courtesy: Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Archive, San Antonio.



Courtesy: University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections.

The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word expanded and modernized their hospital to keep pace with the growing number of patients and rapid advances in health care. The multi-story hospital overlooking Milam Park is seen here in photographs taken in about 1884 (above) and 1935 (left). The tower of San Francisco di Paola Church can be seen in the top left of the later picture.